

**ATZOMPA:  
A POTTERY PRODUCING VILLAGE  
OF SOUTHERN MEXICO IN THE MID-1950'S**



**By  
Jean Clare Hendry**



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CERAMICS AND SOCIETY IN OAXACA

Mary S. Thieme, Special Editor





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## PREFACE

Jean Hendry's *Atzompa: A Pottery Producing village of Southern Mexico in the Mid-1950's* is the inaugural volume in a special series, "Ceramics and Society in Oaxaca", edited by Mary S. Thieme, and to be published in **Vanderbilt University Publications in Anthropology** on a continuing basis. Dr. Hendry's study is both an ethnographic study and a historical document telling of the ceramics industry and its social context in Atzompa in 1955. It is of methodological significance as well, for it reflects the approach of an ethnographer working in the mid-1950's when descriptive-analytical studies were highly valued, and such scholars as Julio de La Fuente, Alfonso Villa Rojas, Robert Redfield, George Foster, Ralph Beals, and Oscar Lewis were conducting some of the best ethnographic research ever done in Mexico.

Two succeeding numbers in this series, authored by Charlotte Stolmaker and Mary S. Thieme, will focus on the social and economic contexts of ceramic production in the same community of Atzompa at the end of the 1960's and again in the early 1990's. This will provide a valuable longitudinal treatment of a cottage industry in a single community by three different anthropologists at three different times over a span of 40 years. What is the significance of ceramics in the life of Atzompa in 1955, 1969, and 1992? What changed and how did it change? How does the pottery produced in Atzompa figure in the economy of the community and that of the city and state of Oaxaca? Does a detailed knowledge of ceramics production in the second half of the twentieth century materially aid the archaeologist concerned with the place of ceramics in Prehispanic and Colonial life? Answers may be sought in these studies and in the works of others who may be encouraged to pursue research on ceramic production in a dozen or so other Oaxacan communities where pottery continues to be made.

Ceramics and ceramic production are of great economic, artistic-esthetic, and historical importance in Oaxaca, and so it has been for at least 3000 years. The vessels and figures of the Valley of Oaxaca, Tehuantepec, and the Mixteca have gained the attention of prehistoric archaeologists for generations and have been the key element in technical-technological, historical-chronological, social-functional, economic, and even political studies of Prehispanic Oaxacan societies. Ceramics continued to be of great importance in Colonial times and, for that matter, throughout the history of the region from the time of the first crude attempts at pottery-making in early times to the present day.

Archaeologists have devoted enormous effort to ceramic analysis, but there are surprisingly few ethnographic studies of modern ceramics for a region where the industry is of such great importance. It seems to be a case of the anthropologist somehow overlooking the obvious, the everyday, the non-exotic aspects of life because they are so common, so ever-present, so ordinary. This, in fact, is what anthropologists are supposed to do best, and Jean Hendry demonstrates that it can be done, and in such a way that her descriptions remain fresh and pertinent nearly forty years after she conducted her research.

"Ceramics and Society in Oaxaca" is a vehicle for monographs having to do with all aspects of pottery and pottery-making: production, distribution, style, use, and the evolution of pottery from earliest prehistoric times to the present. Some studies will be archaeological and highly technical. Others will be ethnographic or ethnohistoric. Still others may focus on ceramics as art and analyze the esthetic and/or symbolic aspects of this medium of expression. Our readers may be surprised to learn how much a sharpened focus on ceramics can tell us, not only about this basic industry which transforms soil and water into useful and artistic products, but also about the lives, thoughts, past and present of those involved in ceramics. Hopefully, this series will encourage others to undertake these much needed studies.

Ronald Spores

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION  
THE PROBLEM

**Some Theoretical Considerations**

An interest in the arts of primitive and peasant peoples is almost as old as anthropology itself, reflecting the changes in theory and orientation which have taken place within the discipline since the beginning of the last century. However, studies of aesthetic activity lie somewhat outside the mainstream of present day anthropology, so that the student concerned with art is faced with a relatively undeveloped area, one in which the boundaries are but vaguely delimited and the central problems hardly defined.

The basic tenets which guide modern ethnographic investigations of art were set forth in the 1920's by Franz Boas.<sup>1</sup> At a period when the doctrine of unilinear evolution was being discredited, he demonstrated the fallacies of attempts to establish world-wide, one-way developmental sequences for art styles, thus opening the way to a more inductive and empirical approach. Each art style, like each culture, was seen as the result of a unique historical growth, the multiple determinants of which must be sought both within the specific cultural setting and in the influences arising from culture contact. Boas was also instrumental in shifting attention from the art products to the art producers, a line of inquiry followed up by Ruth Bunzel, in her work among the Pueblo potters.<sup>2</sup> Though chiefly interested in style fluctuations and mutations, Bunzel went to the potters themselves to obtain information on how they acquire their skills, and how they approach and solve aesthetic problems. Another contribution of Boas, the recognition of the close and necessary connection between art forms and technical processes,<sup>3</sup> was documented by Anita Brenner, who traced the influence of the techniques of mass production on the decorative style of Prehispanic Mexican pottery.<sup>4</sup>

The impact of functionalism upon anthropology led to a more explicit realization that aesthetic activity was social activity. Art was seen to be an institution, related to the totality of groups and institutions that constitute society. The task of the investigator became that of delineating interrelationships and specifying social functions. To the analysis of the art object and the artist was added a third point of reference, the audience or the consumer, who accepts or rejects the work of the artist, and so influences what is produced. Although several students have outlined the functional approach,<sup>5</sup> very little research has been done in this vein. Miguel Covarrubias made some valuable contributions, especially in his book on life and traditions in Bali,<sup>6</sup> but the only systematic ethnographic investigations are Gladys Reichard's work on Navajo weaving and John Adair's study of Navajo and Pueblo silversmiths.<sup>7</sup>

The study presented here represents an attempt to deal with art in a socio-economic, or functional, framework. Through an examination of pottery making in Santa María Atzompa, a village in the State of Oaxaca of southern Mexico, it seeks to discover the functions of this activity and to identify the kinds of interrelationships which link it to the other institutions of the society. Along with a description of the craft in its cultural setting, there is an interest in change. The relative impact of factors which promote stability in pottery making are assessed, and their impact compared to that of factors which encourage change. Finally, there is an effort to determine the extent to which pottery making can be considered an art, and whether the individuals practicing it can properly be called artists as well as craftsmen. Since this topic cannot be addressed without an understanding of what meaning is being applied to the terms "art" and "artist," some minimal definitions are needed.

The view adopted in this study is that art is a process, embodied in a material object or an activity. Art has characteristics which are present in most human experience—order, balance, unity, rhythm. When these characteristics are clarified, intensified, and heightened into consciousness for their own sake, experience becomes aesthetic.<sup>8</sup>

Because art always involves doing or making something, it requires craftsmanship, skill in execution and control over materials and techniques. Along with technical mastery, there is a concern for form. The building blocks of the visual arts are sensory qualities—space, movement, color—which may become imbued with meanings and values.<sup>9</sup> Form is a shorthand term for these qualities, and the relationships that govern them. Since the creation of art objects requires choices, form tends to stabilize over time, and this gives rise to art styles. Certain formal elements and combinations are selected, or emphasized at the expense of others. These become fixed in traditional modes.<sup>10</sup>

A third hallmark of art is disinterestedness, what has been called "psychic distance," for both the maker and the viewer. Art as art is not a means to anything else; it has no consequences external to itself. While aesthetic objects and activities serve many functions, there is always disinterested enjoyment which comes when there is a response to form. This response rarely occurs in isolation, but is bound up with reactions to other aspects of the art object: what it represents, its usefulness, or its monetary or prestige value.

Since craftsmanship is basic to aesthetic activity, art and craft cannot be differentiated sharply. If an object has been worked with feeling for form and arouses some measure of enjoyment through its formal qualities, its purpose, whether or not it is useful, is irrelevant. Artists, however, do differ from craftsmen in their attitudes towards the process of creating a work. By and large, craftsmen work with little aesthetic interest in what they are doing. Traditional forms are mechanically repeated, and once a technique adequate for the job has been acquired, there is no attempt to go beyond it. Artists, on the other hand, care for their work; they take pleasure in it and play with their techniques—experimenting, discovering new problems and solving them, and inventing new forms. Most individuals who produce material things by hand fall somewhere between these two extremes. It is the task of the investigator to find out which type predominates in a given cultural context, and why.

Accepting these definitions, the aims of this investigation can be stated more precisely.

1. What are the functions of pottery making in the village of Atzompa, and are they in any way aesthetic?
2. What proportion of the potters are artists, that is, innovators who do more than reproduce the traditional forms?
3. Do aesthetics enter into any phases of the production process?
4. Do the potters, and the other villagers, respond to the pottery as art forms?

Answers to these questions are sought through an analysis of the pottery complex in all its aspects—learning, techniques, marketing and use. Particular attention is given to the opinions of the potters themselves. There is a consistent attempt to discover how they view their occupation, what satisfactions they derive from it, and what standards they use to evaluate their work. A second focus of the investigation is change, especially in regard to types of pottery, techniques, stylistic development and function in village life. In so far as the data permit, past changes which might explain present conditions are reconstructed. Those taking place today are assessed with respect to their probable effect on the future of the craft. Some of the factors which encourage or inhibit change are found within the pottery complex; others stem from the relation of pottery to the wider community setting and the changes occurring there.

## The Folk Arts of Mexico

Mexican folk arts are among the richest and most varied in the world. Still closely linked to the daily life of the people, they are sufficiently differentiated to be defined and studied as institutions. In addition to being a means of subsistence for those who practice them, folk arts supply articles of domestic use to rural and urban populations. Villages are not only center of production, but in many parts of the country they are important units of consumption.

Alfonso Caso has defined popular art in Mexico as neither a continuation of the art of the pre-Columbian peoples, nor European in its technique and inspiration. Rather it is an amalgamation of the two traditions, resulting from an infusion of European, and probably Asiatic, elements onto an indigenous base.<sup>11</sup> Before the arrival of the Spanish, the arts of Middle America had reached a high degree of perfection. Massive stone pyramids, temples, and palaces were decorated with polychrome paintings and elaborate sculpture. Carving was done in wood, bone, shell, obsidian, jade, and many other materials, while weaving in cotton, maguey fibers, and feathers was an advanced art. Fabrics were colored with animal and vegetable dyes and were stamped or embroidered with intricate designs. Although iron and bronze were unknown, and silver was rarely worked, native smiths beat and cast marvelous ornaments in gold and copper. Pottery, remarkable for its diversity and quantity, was highly developed in all of the major centers of Prehispanic Mexico.

Because much of ancient Mexican art was religious in nature, it suffered from the crusading zeal of the Spanish conquerors. Much of the architecture, sculpture and painting was destroyed, and even the minor arts declined as there was no demand for luxuries. Within a century, however, a Spanish aristocracy had grown up and there was again a market to supply. For the next one hundred and fifty years folk arts flourished. Old methods for producing pottery, weaving and other crafts continued alongside those resulting from the introduction of the wheel and the upright loom. New ideas and materials stimulated the development of new designs. European traditions blended with the native to give rise to such pottery types as the Talavera ware of Puebla. European crafts which were introduced soon took on a distinctive Mexican character--ceramics, glass blowing, leather carving and tooling, and work in iron, steel, and tin.

In the nineteenth century, Mexican folk arts fell into disfavor. Textiles, jewelry, dishes and glassware were imported from Europe and the United States. These foreign articles were highly regarded, while those manufactured at home were thought crude and lacking in taste. This was especially true during the Porfiriato of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. With the Revolution of 1910-20 a wave of nationalism swept the country and helped bring new life to the folk arts. This was also the period in which archaeological work was revealing the achievements of the ancient cultures. There was a glorification of the Prehispanic past and a turning back to things Mexican.

Today, the folk arts enjoy the patronage of the government and are of major importance in the national economy. Pottery, textiles, and baskets continue to fill the needs of the rural population for inexpensive articles for domestic use. To this demand has been added that of the affluent Mexicans and an expanding tourist trade. It has been estimated that approximately two million people make their living directly or indirectly through arts and crafts. Most of these artisans are rural, usually Indian, and work by hand at home; for many, the crafts are the only means of making a living. In contrast, city artisans, usually *mestizos*, (the product of Indian and Spanish mixture) work in factories and produce on a larger scale. Though hand methods are still used, the techniques and tools employed are more complicated, and frequently each worker is responsible for just one step in the production process.

Although the economic future looks bright for the folk arts of Mexico, some fear that the rapidly expanding market will lead to decadence. Caso points to the dangers inherent in mass production, which

may eventually cause the arts to lose their folk characteristics.<sup>12</sup> More and more workers are being drawn from home industries into factories, and many of those who continue to produce at home have altered their materials and their standards in the hope of gaining greater profit. The indiscriminate buying by tourists and urban Mexicans is tending to affect native styles. This trend is augmented when merchants or middlemen encourage the copying of European models or suggest modifications in the products to bring them into conformity with their idea of what they think the consumer wants.

In an effort to remedy the situation, the national government instituted an arts rehabilitation program. Begun in 1951 with the establishment of the National Museum of Popular Arts and Crafts in Mexico City, its aims are to preserve and restore traditional standards of workmanship. Advice and aid on technical problems are offered to the artisans; materials are made available at cost, and craftsmen are provided with an outlet for their work. Museum representatives try to avoid interfering with artistic conceptions or giving suggestions which would alter the design of the finished product.<sup>13</sup> At this time, the program is still very much in the experimental stage and has affected only certain areas of the country.

Despite their importance, contemporary folk arts have been the subject of very few systematic studies. There are several general surveys, and some of the techniques of manufacturing pottery have been described. Until recently, these descriptions were restricted to scattered references to methods employed in a few of the better known pottery producing villages.<sup>14</sup> In 1955, however, George Foster did a preliminary summary of the major techniques of southern and central Mexico, distinguishing the different types, mapping their distribution, and tracing their probable origin.<sup>15</sup> Foster also went beyond techniques to include other aspects of pottery making. In his monograph on Tzintzuntzan he discusses pottery making as it is carried out in the family circle, the role of pottery in the economic life of the village, and the development of a new type of ware by one of the more gifted potters.<sup>16</sup> Currently, Tzintzuntzan is the locale for an intensive survey conducted in conjunction with the government's arts rehabilitation project. The study is designed to get at such variables as the age, sex, and number of years of experience of the potters, the division of labor by sex, and the types of pottery produced. The results are as yet unpublished.

The relative lack of investigation into the folk arts meant there were few guidelines available to assist in selecting a site which would offer good conditions for further research. The most productive regions are those where the great indigenous cultures of the past flourished: Michoacan, Jalisco, the Central Plateau and central Oaxaca.<sup>17</sup> I spent a month exploring Michoacan, with disappointing results. Meanwhile, friends were recommending Oaxaca, and a visit south made it clear that Oaxaca could provide the conditions I was looking for. Since it was there I settled to carry out the study, a brief general description of the region and its history is presented below.

#### THE SETTING: THE VALLEY OF OAXACA

The state of Oaxaca is located in southern Mexico, along the Pacific Coast, where the two great mountain chains--the Sierra Madre Oriental and the Sierra Madre Occidental--come together, making it one of the most mountainous regions in the country. Physically and climatically Oaxaca is extremely varied, ranging from high, cold mountains in the north to the tropical lowlands of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. In the central portion the mountains define a number of spacious valleys of which the largest is the Valley of Oaxaca, opening out towards the southwest and lying about 5,000 feet above sea level. The valley has a temperate climate, with fertile lands, a mean temperature of 72 degrees, and an annual rainfall of 16 to 17 inches. The hottest months occur just before the rainy season which begins in May and lasts into September. The winter nights are apt to be cool, and even cold. Oaxaca city is the capital and commercial hub of the state.



## Historical Background

At the time of Spanish contact, the two major ethnic groups in the valley were the Zapotecs, who occupied the central valleys, and their neighbors to the northwest, the Mixtecs, who were culturally and linguistically similar.<sup>18</sup> Nothing certain is known of the origin of the Zapotecs. The first firm evidence of their presence in the valley reveals a sedentary, fully developed culture—a technically advanced type of pottery, life-sized human figures carved in stone, and a system of writing. This evidence comes from the site of Monte Albán, located within a few miles of present day Oaxaca city. During the Classic period, Monte Albán flourished as an urban center. Abandoned in later times, it continued to serve as a religious and ritual center for the Zapotec. By the fourteenth century the Mixtec had established settlements in the valley. The Aztecs rose to power in central Mexico in the 15th century, moved south in a series of military campaigns, and brought most of the towns of the valley into a tributary status.

The economic base of Zapotec society was agriculture and small industries. Land was cultivated, either individually or by cooperative work groups, using the techniques of slash-and-burn and the digging stick; the staple crops were corn, beans, and squash. Weaving, pottery making, and the manufacture of ornaments were well developed. Most craft production was carried on in the home, probably often the responsibility of the women. The products were sold in periodic markets and were exported by the traders to other areas. Zapotec religion was closely associated with government. The dead were honored in ceremonies with offerings of food and incense, and much of Zapotec art was consecrated to their service. As elsewhere in Mesoamerica, the calendrical system was important.

The history of Spanish colonization in Oaxaca differs little from that in other parts of Mesoamerica. Although the Conquest was perhaps not as harsh as in some areas, it wrought profound changes in a relatively short span of time. Oaxaca was made part of a huge grant by the Spanish crown to Cortés, who had been attracted by reports of its mineral wealth and selected it as his personal domain. The city of Oaxaca, formerly the site of an Aztec garrison, was founded by 500 Spanish families in 1526 under the name of Antequera, and soon grew to be an important political and economic center. By the sixteenth century the Dominican friars were entrenched; they had converted the majority of the Indians and put them to work constructing churches and monasteries.<sup>19</sup> The Spanish established schools and institutions of higher learning, and they improved horticulture by the introduction of the plow, new crops and techniques of cultivation. Other changes were less advantageous for the indigenous population.

Through the system of *encomiendas* Spanish colonists were granted the right to exact tribute and services from individual Indians or from whole villages. Although originally a temporary measure to facilitate the spread of the Christian faith and reward the conquerors of the New World, the *encomiendas*, came to be extended from one generation to another. They gradually developed into a feudalistic pattern in which the villagers were regarded as serfs. Many Indians died from hardships, and more were decimated by European diseases. Nevertheless, the Zapotecs as a people survived, retaining their linguistic identity and some aspects of their culture, especially their religious customs, which continued to be practiced along with Catholicism.

The Colonial period merged into the period of Independence with little effect on the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca. Few took an active part in the war against Spain, and the changes which followed were political rather than economic in nature. The *encomiendas* had been abolished, but they were replaced by *haciendas*, large landed estates,<sup>20</sup> which depended on the paid labor of tenant farmers and servants. Although the resident laborers were, in theory, free agents and were allowed to cultivate small parcels of land for their own use, a system of advance payment effectively indebted them and bound them to the estates as they were usually too deeply in debt to leave. Small industries established in the city of Oaxaca, and the mining industry provided possible sources of income for landless Indians, but wages were scarcely better than those paid for day labor in agriculture. Many of the traditional crafts remained the

responsibility of the women. Racial and cultural assimilation, begun at the time of the conquest, continued, and the *mestizo* class, came to play an increasingly important role in political and economic life. Although, in the aggregate, the Indians occupied the lowest rung in society, a few overcame the status barriers and rose to positions of prominence. Notable among these was the Zapotec, Benito Juárez.

The revolution which swept Mexico from 1910 to 1920 had social and economic consequences. Efforts were made to raise the standard of living in the villages, and government programs were set up to improve health, sanitation, and education. The pressing agrarian problem was attacked by the Land Redistribution Act, incorporated into the constitution of 1917. Under this law, many of the large estates were broken up and their holdings apportioned to communities without sufficient lands. Grants were made in the form of *ejidos* to groups of twenty or more eligible individuals, who worked the land either individually or collectively.<sup>21</sup> Although the *ejido* is less prevalent in Oaxaca than in the northern and central regions of the country, it forms an integral part of the land holdings of many villages.

### Modern Oaxaca

Today, Oaxaca remains a very Indian state. More than half of the population lives in rural pre-industrialized communities that have changed little since colonial times. In the mountains to the north and west, notably in the Mixteca Alta, the communities are separated from each other and have little contact with the outside world. With poor lands and lacking roads, schools and health facilities, the people struggle to make a living and have little opportunity to advance economically or socially. Few speak Spanish, and the illiteracy rate is high. The valley towns in the region around the Oaxaca city are more prosperous. Travel is possible by a system of dirt roads and antiquated buses, while the Pan-American highway, extended southward within the last fifteen years, is opening up the valley to the rest of Mexico. Yet, even in the Valley of Oaxaca, many of the old ways survive. Farming and cottage industries continue to form the base of the economy, and the products are sold or exchanged in weekly markets. Although Spanish is taught in the rural schools, and each year the number of speakers increases, Zapotec is the preferred tongue within many of the villages.<sup>22</sup> A sense of cultural identity remains strong.

Oaxaca city is the economic and religious focus of valley culture and an important center for the state as a whole. People from the surrounding villages, from the remote mountain regions, and from as far south as Tehuantepec pour in with their wares on Saturday to sell and to buy. In December, for the three day fiesta of the Virgin of the Soledad, patron saint of Oaxaca, Indians gather from every part of the state, many making the journey by oxcart or by foot. Other major religious events draw almost equal crowds. These periodic influxes, along with the large concentration of Indian residents, give Oaxaca a predominately indigenous tone, despite the fact that the majority of the population is *mestizo* or of Spanish descent.

For the villagers the heart of the city is the market. Reported to be one of the largest on the continent,<sup>23</sup> it is housed in buildings that cover several blocks. On Saturday, marketing activity spills over into adjacent streets, where those who have come in from the country set up temporary stalls or spread their wares on the curb. Along with the regional agricultural products and crafts, there are manufactured goods—clothing, inexpensive jewelry, bolts of cloth, household utensils—imported from other parts of Mexico or from abroad. The market is organized spatially according to the type of product sold— one plaza for pottery, another for baskets, a section for meats, another nearby for vegetables, and each vendor claims a location for which a small fee is paid. The market has its own church, San Juan de Dios, its own restaurants and *cantinas* (bars), its groups of strolling guitar players. It is a meeting place, not only for trade but for social intercourse, recreation, and gossip.

In the past twenty years, Oaxaca has gained in importance as a headquarters for the rapidly expanding mining industries of the state. This has accounted for some of its growth, and greater changes may be expected in the future from the tourists who are coming in increasing numbers since the completion of the highway and the beginning of air service from Mexico City. North American tourists, attracted by the ancient ruins, and villages famous for their crafts, come to Oaxaca for two or three days. A small but growing colony have made the capital their permanent home. Mexicans from the north come to vacation during Holy Week, or to see the round of fiestas that takes place at Christmas. At the present time, the effects of the tourist trade are confined chiefly to Oaxaca city's numerous small shops selling regional handicrafts, but tourism is beginning to have ramifications that are reaching the village level throughout the central valley.

### The Crafts of the Valley

The importance of the crafts in the economic life of the valley is indicated by the fact that in a recent (1949) study of the region, nineteen out of twenty-one villages visited were found to have at least one small industry.<sup>24</sup> Although many of these villages are producing purely utilitarian products, such as bricks, tiles, salt, and calcium, others, such as pottery and weaving communities, produce objects for adornment as well as for utilitarian purposes. Oaxaca city is known for its textiles, metal work, and pottery. In one section of town, the *barrio* of Xochimilco, almost every house is also a small textile factory, with two to four upright looms turning out cotton cloth for table cloths, bedspreads, and articles of clothing. The weavers are invariably men and, in the larger establishments, looms are powered by electric motors. Jewelers and metalsmiths work either individually at home or in shops. Using the lost wax process, they cast gold plated replicas of the Mixtec ornaments found in the tombs of Monte Albán. These are for tourists, but the gold filigree earrings produced by the smiths are popular with local people.

Pottery making in the city has begun to approach the proportions of a large scale industry. The use of the kick wheel and the press mold permit quantity production, and the firing is done in gas kilns. Workshops employ from five to a dozen individuals, each of whom is skilled in only one or two steps of the process and is paid by the piece. All of the ware is glazed; the most common type has a multicolored finish in runny greens, blues, and browns. It is made in a variety of shapes—ashtrays in the form of sombreros, vases with Aztec motifs, jugs decorated with the calendar stone along with the more practical cups and bowls. Some of the larger retail stores have their own pottery factories, for example Casa Brena turns out dinner sets in pastel underglazes with geometric designs in gold.

None of these industries can properly be called folk art, since they utilize methods which are somewhat mechanized and are produced under a semi-factory system. Many are owned or run by foreigners and the employees are men who usually live, as well as work in the city. In contrast, although the crafts of the villages have also undergone some innovation in techniques and forms, most continue to be made in the traditional manner and often by women. The four most important craft villages of the region are located quite close to the capital: Mitla, Teotitlan del Valle, San Bartolo Coyotepec, and Santa María Atzompa. With the exception of Atzompa, they are Zapotec-speaking communities.

In Mitla the body or belt loom is used to produce woolen belts and *rebozos*--the long shawl worn by women throughout Middle America. One end of the loom is attached to some stationary object, the other to the weaver's body by a belt so that the tension of the warp can be controlled. Formerly a woman's craft, weaving by this ancient method is now done principally by men, although women participate in the preparation and dying of the wool, and children are adept at tying the fringe into intricate patterns. The making of *rebozos* is apparently new to Mitla, as E. C. Parsons makes no mention of it in her detailed ethnography of 1936. At that time the men and some of the women wove belts and skirt lengths which were sold in the village or in the nearby town of Tlacolula.<sup>25</sup> Today, Mitla *rebozos*



are taken to Oaxaca, where they are bought by tourists and wealthier residents, but they are rarely worn by the villagers who prefer factory produced, dark cotton *rebozos* imported from other parts of Mexico.

Teotitlan is famous for its woolen blankets or *serapes*. Here, too, weaving is carried on by the men, but it is done on the European horizontal loom. Although aniline dyes are replacing those which the weavers used to make themselves from herbs and vegetables, the village still produces handsome *serapes* in black, white and soft grays. The *greca*, or "Mitla design," has been copied from the stone mosaics of the Mitla ruins; since it is a stepped pattern suitable for weaving, it is popular. Less fortunate developments are the weaving of Aztec motifs in gaudy colors for the tourist market.

Atzompa and Coyotepec are both pottery making villages, each specializing in a particular type of ware. Of the two, Coyotepec is the better known for its polished black ware, which has changed little since pre-Conquest days.<sup>26</sup> The method by which this color is obtained is considered a trade secret by Coyotepec potters, who guard it jealously. Most students who have visited the village, however, agree that the color is the result of firing the pottery in a reducing atmosphere, using kilns which are built below ground and sealed with wet adobe after a certain temperature has been reached.<sup>27</sup> The glossy finish is achieved by burnishing with a quartz stone before firing. The most characteristic shape produced in the village is the *cántaro*--a globular round-bottomed jar with a narrow neck and flaring lip. *Cántaros* are used for carrying water; small ones are employed commercially for bottling *mescal*, an intoxicating drink made from the maguey plant. Other products include *cajetes*--large shallow bowls, toy whistles in the shape of animals, bells in the form of women with flaring skirts, and figurines of sirens playing guitars. The forming of the pieces is done by the women; the men do the firing, help with the polishing, and sometimes model, or press from molds, the small figurines and toys.

During the last few years, Coyotepec has become a tourist attraction. Located about nine miles south of Oaxaca city, it has been bisected by the Pan American highway and is within easy driving distance for large groups of North Americans who are brought by guides to see how the famous black pottery is made. This has not only increased the amount of pottery made for the tourist trade but has created a good deal of ill-will in the village, since most of the attention is focused on one potter, Rosa Nieto. Although skilled in her craft, today she mainly gives demonstrations for admiring visitors. Other Coyotepec potters are envious, resenting her reputation and the money she derives from it. Such a situation could put obvious difficulties in the way of a student attempting to work there, as it involves the risk of having to choose between the most outstanding, but now atypical, individual and the rest of the community. Either restriction would be unfortunate since a comparison between Rosa and the other potters would be essential to any study done in Coyotepec.

Atzompa is situated northwest of Oaxaca, separated from the city by the River Atoyac which flows westward through the valley. It is thus somewhat off the beaten track and, although occasionally tourists find their way into the village, the road is poor and during much of the rainy season impassible except by foot. Atzompa potters specialize in green glazed ware that is the domestic pottery of the region. They also make a red, unglazed type and turn out a variety of toys and animal forms by methods that are similar to those employed in Coyotepec.

Any of these four villages is potentially a good locale for a study of folk art. Atzompa, however, has certain characteristics which made it more attractive than the other three. In comparison to Mitla and Teotitlan its products are more widely used by the villagers themselves and by the people in the area as a whole, and although perhaps not as artistic, its pottery is more varied in form and function than that of Coyotepec. Further, unlike the latter village, it is subject to comparatively few invasions from tourists and there was no *prima donna* among its potters to cause problems of local jealousies and antagonisms for the investigator. Finally there is the matter of language. Field work in the other craft villages would have been possible without knowledge of Zapotec, but collecting information would have been more

difficult, especially in informal situations, and from women who are often less accustomed to using Spanish than men. Although the fact that Atzompa is now completely Spanish-speaking raises the probability that it is a more acculturated village, this was not a crucial consideration for my study, and it was outweighed by the advantage of relatively easy and open communication with informants. For these reasons, therefore, I selected Atzompa and at the end of January, 1955, began field work which lasted for eight months.

## THE RESEARCH PLAN

### Field Relations

My initial contact with Atzompa came through the Oaxaca museum as the director, Sr. Manuel Gamio, had me taken on an inspection tour of the four craft villages. The museum, however, has no program for the crafts, and has few connections in rural communities. After I had made the decision to work in Atzompa, it was a North American couple who introduced me to a family they knew. It was explained that I was a student who was interested in the pottery, would like to learn how to make it, and was looking for a place to live. It took a week, and several more trips to Atzompa, to make the necessary arrangements--whitewash the walls of what was to be my room, put up a hammock, and collect some wooden boxes to serve as furniture. Supposedly I was paying rent, but the question of how much was never successfully settled, and in the end I simply left a gift of money.

The family, which had acquired a resident anthropologist, consisted of Felipe Aguilar, his wife, and eight children who lived in one house, and his two unmarried sisters, a widowed brother and his young son who occupied a larger two room dwelling immediately adjoining Felipe's.<sup>28</sup> My living quarters were in the house of the brother, Tomás, in a corner of the rear room which was used for storage and poultry. A bamboo screen was put up to give me semi-privacy in my half of the apartment, but turkeys continued to inhabit the other half, and I developed strong feelings about them before the end of my stay. The first month of field work was spent in getting to know the family, improving my Spanish and solving housekeeping problems.

My living conditions put me into daily contact with the Aguilars and set up a series of relationships with them. Shortly after my arrival I acquired the role of *comadre* to Felipe and his wife by becoming "Godmother of the candle" to their youngest child. This helped to define my position in the household. I became good friends with two daughters near my own age and with Catalina, one of the unmarried sisters who was about fifty. Along with companionship and emotional support, they supplied me with much data and a chance to check on information that I obtained later from other sources. Catalina (Tía Lina), in particular, proved to be a mine of anecdotes about herself and everyone else, and developed the habit of dropping into my room almost every evening. The other women of the family frequently gathered there too, to smoke, gossip, and sample my food, while the younger children were in and out at all hours, providing me with entertainment, interruptions, and some information not obtained from the adults.

Although during this initial period I met few people outside of the Aguilars and their immediate neighbors, I had more than enough to keep me occupied. Ten of the fourteen members of the family were potters, so much of my time was devoted to observing them at work, asking questions, and taking pictures. I spent long hours trying to learn to make pottery with the methods they used, but in this endeavor I had little success beyond providing them with much amusement and gaining some idea of the difficulties of the craft. I helped with glazing, stacking and firing the kiln, and I accompanied the family on their selling trips to Oaxaca. I entered as fully as possible into their other activities--making tortillas,<sup>29</sup>

going to the river to bathe and wash clothes, shopping in the village plaza on market day, and attending church.

It was this kind of participation which structured one of my roles in the family--that of one who did not know and had to be instructed and guided. While I exploited the pupil role and learned a great deal from it, there were times when it was too close to reality to be comfortable. I could not turn out a pot, make a respectable tortilla, or even speak correctly, and I found myself resenting the fact that I was continually judged on these terms. This is one of the minor hazards for the fieldworker who becomes too deeply involved in participant observation and tries to live up to standards which are not her own. On the other hand, such feelings were infrequent and often the teacher-pupil relationship was reciprocal. I had certain skills which were interesting or useful to them--as a letter writer, photographer, medicine dispenser, and expert on life in the United States.

A second role was that of marriageable female, which gave rise to much joking and half-serious advice. I was to let my hair grow, pierce my ears, hold my wedding in the village, and settle down with a responsible Atzompeño. As the family and I came to know each other better, my position approximated that of a daughter, and I began to fear that I should suffer from over-protection. They did not like me to be out alone after dark, told me how much I could drink and with whom I could dance at fiestas, and tried to provide me with an escort when I went to remoter parts of the village. I did not take these restrictions seriously, and they were not enforced, probably because women in Atzompa, as in any Mexican village, move about with more freedom than they do in urban communities. Accepting a feminine role did not curtail my work with the potters, since most of them are women. It did mean, however, that I was limited in regard to some activities (for example I did not go to public fiestas alone), and was cut off from all functions that were exclusively male.

With time my position in the community as a whole came to be much the same as it was in the Aguilar family. During my first week I had heard that some people were angry at my coming to live in Atzompa, and were suspicious of my intentions. I therefore hastened to see the *presidente*, to get his permission to remain. After receiving his consent, I felt more secure, but continued to move slowly. I heard no further objections to my presence, and by the time I started to widen my circle of informants, everyone seemed to know something about me and was eager to question me.

Contacts with other families were established gradually. The Aguilars suggested that I call on neighbors and friends, or took me to houses where special types of pottery were produced. Some contacts were made on trips to and from Oaxaca city and a wedding of one of the Aguilar daughters gave me an opportunity to meet people in a social context. Most informants, however, were acquired by means of my camera. Once it was known that I photographed and gave away pictures, I was besieged with requests to come and visit. Most people offered to pay for the prints, and when I refused money, presented me with gifts of food and pottery.

People in the village had various ideas as to my business there. Word had spread that I was trying to learn pottery with the Aguilars. Those who thought that this was my main purpose encouraged me, telling me of their own difficulties when beginning. Some assumed my interest was commercial, that, like other North Americans, I was going to buy and ship back large quantities of pottery, and once I overheard a man announce that I was going to build a pottery factory in Atzompa. Others believed my profession to be photography; one informant was convinced that I was going to sell the pictures, if not there, in the States. A few classified me as a student, although they were astonished to learn the number of years I had been in school.

After the first couple of months, the question as to why I was in Atzompa, and what I was doing there ceased to bother anyone. I came to be taken for granted as a curious but harmless phenomenon in

village life. My role crystallized into that of visitor and friend who was expected to come every week or so to watch the pottery making, take pictures, ask a few questions, and answer a dozen more about myself and the United States. Many people were somewhat shocked that I had travelled alone to a strange country and were inclined to be protective and sorry for me. There were constant inquiries about my parents, and each time older North Americans came into the village, I was congratulated on receiving a visit from my father and mother.

Although it was relatively easy to gain initial acceptance into the community, there were some problems involved in staying on good terms with a number of different families. The most serious concerned the photography which had proved so helpful in establishing rapport. Everyone was interested in the pictures I took, and, in most cases, the desire to see them was nothing more than curiosity. Several families, however, began pressing me to give them pictures of particular individuals. Fortunately, I was aware of some of the techniques employed in witchcraft, and discussion with the Aguilers convinced me that this was the purpose of the requests. Though my refusal to grant "this little favor" created strained relations with those families, compliance would have brought about an explosive situation and resulted in the loss of confidence of my other informants. From that time, I let it be known that I gave photographs only to individuals who appeared in them. This prevented further requests and allayed the anxieties of those who felt they might be the victims of my credulity.

A second potential difficulty was the expectation of many of the men that I could be of help in getting them contracts to work in the United States. For a while I feared that it would be thought that I was deliberately withholding a service I could perform. Eventually the misconception died out, either because my explanations on the matter were accepted or because it was noticed that I was doing nothing for my *compadre* Felipe, one of whose sons wanted to go to the States.

A final problem area was the existence of bad feeling and long-standing quarrels among many of the families I visited regularly. However, the quarrels tended to be private affairs, rarely involved more than two families, and did not split the village into factions. This situation is quite different from that of a community aligned into antagonistic groups, where an anthropologist may run the risk of being caught in the middle. In Atzompa social solidarity outside the nuclear family is not structured along any definite lines, and each family is slightly suspicious and hostile toward all the others. The outsider, therefore, may be accepted and trusted more than a neighbor or even the close relative with whom one had been at odds for years.

## Research Methodology

Since the greater part of my background data on the village, and much detailed information on pottery were gathered through participant observation in one family, the question arises as to whether the Aguilers are representative of Atzompa as a whole. According to their own statements, they were once wealthy, and the house shows signs of having been a large one. Today, however, it is in disrepair, and the family is only slightly better off than the average, falling considerably below the economic level of the several wealthy, more urbanized families of the village. Neither Felipe nor his brother hold government posts, but their father, Felipe Sr., was *presidente*, and one of the sons-in-law is beginning to work his way up the political hierarchy. Tomás is a cantor in the church, as was his father, and he and his sisters acted as officials in one of the major religious fiestas during the time I was there. Felipe is the conductor of one of the local bands, and his two older sons are musicians. Along with what appeared to me to be normal participation in village life, the family as a whole is generally respected as "honorable people." As I came to know other households, I found that the Aguilers, in comparison, were perhaps a little more conservative and a little more reserved than some, but in no way unusual. At the time that I moved in, their experience with North Americans was, if anything, more limited than that of families whose sons or husbands had been to the States to work.



Quantitative data on pottery, and a wider view of village life, were obtained by observation and interviewing in 69 other families, ten of which did not make pottery. This sample represents about 17 per cent of the population. It has a disproportionate number of non-potters, because I wanted to be able to make comparisons between those who practice the craft and those who do not. The household is the pottery working group, so I took it, rather than the individual, as my unit. How to define "household" was, however, a question, since two or more nuclear families often live in the same dwelling. I decided to use domestic arrangements as the criterion. Families in which women shared cooking and other tasks, I took as one unit. Those in which these activities were carried on separately, I considered to be separate households. Within each household I attempted to interview all working potters, which gave me a total of 124 individuals.

The sample is not a random one and is subject to bias on at least two counts—my close association with the Aguilar, and the fact that the majority of my informants chose me because they wanted to be photographed. To some extent, the first factor was canceled out by the second. With my camera I was able to gain entrance into households where the members were barely on speaking terms with the Aguilar. As I began to acquire more contacts than I could use, the role of the camera was diminished. From the 104 families with which I became acquainted, I chose the ones with characteristics relevant to the study—age, economic status, and type of pottery. Since I lived in the center of the village, I made an effort to reach families situated on the outskirts (see Map B for the location of the informants). People who had not approached me, but whom I thought should be included, I sought out. I sometimes used photographs of places or events which I thought might interest them, as an excuse for the first visit.

From each pottery making family in the sample I collected roughly equivalent material on techniques, economics, and learning experience, along with background information. A short list of questions, designed to get at attitudes, was standardized; the questions were phrased in the same way and asked in approximately the same order.<sup>30</sup> I also showed a series of photographs of pottery to all informants, requiring them to make choices which I hoped would reveal something of their aesthetic standards.<sup>31</sup> A minimum of four to five visits was necessary to obtain these data, and for some families it took up to twenty visits.

The first visit was invariably chaotic; the neighbors and all the children in the vicinity swarmed in and it was impossible to sort out who belonged to the household and how they were related. On subsequent visits things usually calmed down and I was able to start questioning, almost always, however, in the presence of other people. For many topics the lack of privacy did not matter, but for a few it limited the amount of data I could collect. In most families, for example, when I asked the attitude questions more than once everyone simply agreed with the opinion of whoever answered first. Several of my informants were themselves very good interviewers, and at the end of a visit would remark that they had found out just about everything they wanted to know.

In observing and questioning informants there were few problems of resistance to overcome. I never had to drop a family from the sample because of refusal to be interviewed, and out of the more than 160 individuals to whom I showed the photographs, only two failed to respond. Families who seemed reluctant or were hard to talk to, I called on during the rainy season when cloud bursts gave me an excuse to lengthen my visit, and I was usually able to get all the information I needed before the rain had stopped. Most people, however, were quite willing to answer questions and were not bothered by the notebook and pencil when I used them. They defined the interviewing as a social situation, so much so, that I had to continue to visit some families after I had completed the interviews, to avoid offending them.

Two additional circumstances which limited the data should be mentioned. The first is that I was in Atzompa a relatively short time and, during this period, work was sometimes curtailed because of

sickness or because the river which separates the village from Oaxaca prevented me from returning after a journey to the city. The second factor was my inadequate Spanish which made communication difficult during the early months and undoubtedly resulted in some loss of material. With time this problem was solved and I came to feel that my initial difficulties had been an effective rapport device, as everyone in Atzompa took credit for my improvement in the language.

### Notes to Chapter 1

1. Boas, 1927.
2. Bunzel, 1929.
3. W. H. Holmes had stressed the effect of technical processes at an earlier date, but Boas made it central to his definition and analysis of form.
4. Brenner, 1931.
5. Stewer, 1935; Tomars, 1940; Mendeita y Nuñez, 1947, 1948.
6. Covarrubias, 1950.
7. Reichard, 1936; Adair, 1944.
8. This definition is derived from John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, 1934.
9. Langer, 1942.
10. Boas defined style as stability of form. Boas, 1927 p. 11.
11. Caso, 1942, p.25
12. Caso, 1942, p. 25.
13. Interview with Dr. Rubín de la Borbolla, Director of the Popular Arts Museum in Mexico City, November 1954.
14. For example, the study of Paul and Henriette Van de Velde, 1939.
15. Foster, 1955.
16. Foster, 1948.
17. Caso, 1954, pp 91-92
18. The historical materials of this section are drawn from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1949, and from Iturribarría, 1952.
19. Covarrubias, 1946 p. 206.

20. *Haciendas* developed out of *encomiendas* as many of the *encomenderos* took advantage of laws designed to protect the Indians to consolidate and legalize the titles to their holdings. Other colonists amassed property by direct purchase from the Indians who were always in need of money to pay the heavy tribute exacted by the crown. Whetten, 1948, pp. 82-84.
21. To be eligible an individual must be over sixteen, must personally and habitually work the land, and must not hold plots of a size equal or larger than the grant unit. Whetten, p. 182.
22. In Oaxaca 47 per cent are bilingual and 17 per cent speak only some native language. Compare for Mexico as a whole--8 per cent are bilingual and 4 per cent speak only a native language. Mexican census for 1950, Vol. 4, Oaxaca.
23. Augur, 1954. p. 98.
24. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, p. 494.
25. Parsons, 1936, p. 45.
26. Similar black pottery has been found at archeological sites at Monte Albán.
27. Sayles, 1955, p. 955; Foster, 1955, p. 23.
28. See Appendix II for a kinship chart of the Aguilar family.
29. Flat corn cakes, staple item of Mexican diet. See Appendix V for a glossary of Spanish terms.
30. See Appendix I for this list of questions.
31. See Appendix III for these photographs.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VILLAGE

#### GENERAL FEATURES

Santa María Atzompa is located in the valley of Etna, five miles northwest of the city of Oaxaca. Administratively it includes the outlying hamlets (*ranchos*) of Santa Catarina Montaña, La Soledad, and Yahuiche which were formerly *haciendas*. The nearest neighboring village is San Jacinto Amilpas situated a few miles to the east on the shores of the River Atoyac. To the west, Atzompa's territory adjoins that of San Lorenzo Cacaotepec. At the north end of the valley lies the town of Etna; the southern limits of the village are bounded by low hills which terminate in the ruin-covered summit of Monte Albán.

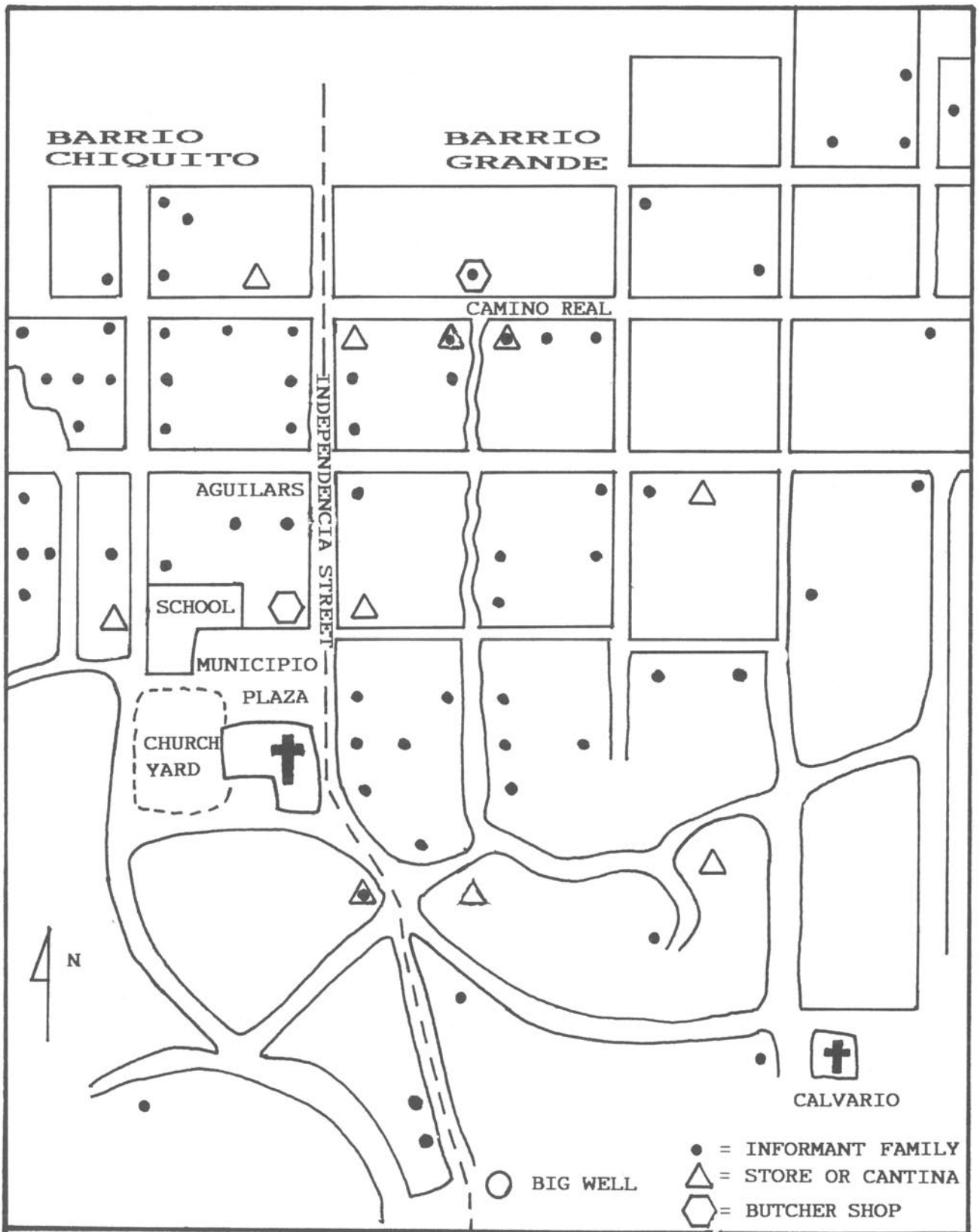
Other than the fact that the village acquired titles to its lands in 1828, little is known of its history and nothing certain of its origin. Lying on what was the Mixtec-Zapotec frontier in the Prehispanic era, it has been referred to as Mixtec by one student, and Zapotec by another,<sup>1</sup> but there is no real evidence to indicate which of these peoples were the original founders. Although a few of the older villagers remember that something other than Spanish was spoken many years ago, all traces of the native language have been lost. One man thought it might have been Mixtec, but there is no sense of identification with this group today, the Mixtecs being regarded as outsiders. Another informant recalled that when her grandparents were young, people greeted each other in a different manner, saying "*quaslo*" to the men and "*quaslinche*" to the women. These words, however, are derivations or corruptions of Nahuatl, as is the name of the village which means "water on the hill top." Aztec place names are common throughout the central valley, even for Zapotec speaking communities. Retentions in this language provide no clues to the problem of origin, nor does the persistence of Indian patterns in some aspects of village life. The differences between Mixtec and Zapotec cultures were not great enough to survive the four hundred years of Spanish influence in this part of Oaxaca.

A tentative hypothesis concerning the history of Atzompa has been suggested by Iturrubarría, head librarian of Oaxaca and student of its ancient cultures. Considering its location, he feels that the village was originally Zapotec but may have undergone a Mixtec invasion at the time of the last occupation of Monte Albán. Later, it was quite possibly the center of an Aztec colony, since two of the nearby communities, San Martín Mexicapan and San Juan Chapultepec, were founded by the Aztecs when they conquered the valley. These successive invasions would account for the loss of ethnic identification, and the quick adoption of Spanish in place of the native language. Iturrubarría is careful to point out that there is no existing proof in support of his conjectures, and that the question of Atzompa's origin will remain unanswered until archeological work has been carried out in the immediate vicinity.<sup>2</sup>

Atzompa today is a large village of over 1600 inhabitants. The central portion is thickly settled and laid out in a fairly orderly fashion in blocks. On the outskirts, and especially on the southern edge where the settlement spills over into the hills, the houses are scattered and isolated, and the streets tend to become paths. The main road, the *Camino Real*, is one of the principal routes from San Jacinto and Oaxaca to the villages to the west, and along it are located the largest butcher shop, one of the two corn mills, and many of the small stores. The church and other public buildings stand several blocks to the south on higher ground. The church is an old one, built by the Dominicans in the early days of the Conquest. Renovated in 1879, it is again badly in need of repairs due to damage from the 1931 earthquake. Next to the church is what is called the plaza, a small roofed enclosure where the weekly market is held, and, situated close by, are the municipal building and the school. There is no real plaza



Map 1: Santa María Atzompa



or square, either the church yard or the school grounds being used for public fiestas and other village gatherings. The Calvario, a small chapel, stands at the southeastern corner of the village, its highest point, from which a good view of the valley can be obtained.

All streets are unpaved, and some are so gullied by rains that they are down to bedrock and considerably below the level of the houses, which must be reached by steps. The typical Atzompa house is rectangular in shape; the thick adobe walls are occasionally plastered and whitewashed, but more often left in their natural state. In the center of town tile roofs of either one or two slopes are common, while on the outskirts roofs are more apt to be thatched, and frequently the house itself is constructed of cane instead of adobe. Each dwelling is surrounded by a fence of huge organ cactus, planted close together, forming an effective barrier to keep children and animals inside, and intruders out. Gates made of cane, or a tangle of spiny brambles, are set in place at night. Some houses are large, but old and dilapidated, while others are in ruins and have been abandoned. It is these which give the village its air of having known better days.

Atzompa has two sections (*barrios*), *el Grande* which is the eastern part of the town and *el Chiquito* lying to the west, the dividing line being Independencia street. The villagers also make a distinction between the lower section (*abajo*) around the Camino Real, and the higher parts (*arriba*) extending between the church and the Calvario. Except during the height of the dry season water is reasonably abundant, though not pure, as there are no pumps and it is taken from the surface of shallow wells. The village has one large spring-fed well, which often dries up in March or April, and several smaller ones. Some are located on private lands but anyone is free to use them. The Rio Chiquito, a stream which flows northwest of Atzompa and eventually joins the Atoyac, provides another source of water.

For the last eighteen years there has been regular bus service to and from Oaxaca. The ancient vehicles run five times a day and more or less on schedule, despite flat tires, engine troubles, and a tendency to catch fire. They provide a rough sort of clock for the villagers, who mark the hours by their arrival and departure. During the rainy season, when the Atoyac can no longer be forded by motor vehicles, the half hour trip to the city is considerably lengthened, since people must walk to San Jacinto, wade the river, and board the bus on the other side. When the current is swift, the women cross in long lines, holding on to one another, clutching at their skirts and balancing bundles on their heads. On many days at the end of the summer, and in the early months of the fall, the river is too deep to be crossed safely. Then, it becomes necessary to take the longer route and enter Oaxaca from the south where there is a bridge over the Atoyac. The journey is an arduous one of three to four hours, since the road lies through the hills and is often knee-deep in mud. Most people travel with their burros and a few ride in ox carts. In any season of the year there are people who prefer to save the twenty centavo bus fare and walk the five miles into the city. Other than Oaxaca and San Jacinto, the communities surrounding Atzompa must be reached by foot.

In 1950, the village numbered 1631 inhabitants; the addition of those living on the three *ranchos* each of which has a population of less than 100, brings the figure to 1839.<sup>3</sup> The ratio of men to women is almost equal, 100 to 102. Since 1940, Atzompa has increased 15 per cent, slightly less than the state as a whole but a great deal more than some of the other valley towns, which seem to be losing population to the city. In the same ten year period, Oaxaca city has grown almost 60 per cent, and Atzompa may have contributed more to the urban area than the figures indicate, as at least some of its own increment is due to people moving in from the *ranchos* and other villages.

In physical appearance, the Atzompeños range from Indian to Spanish types, most being clearly a mixture of the two strains. They vary greatly in height, skin color and other features. In dress, they conform to the norm for other rural communities in the valley. The men wear white cotton pants, held up by a narrow woven belt, an undershirt that is usually of some color, and a second shirt of white cotton

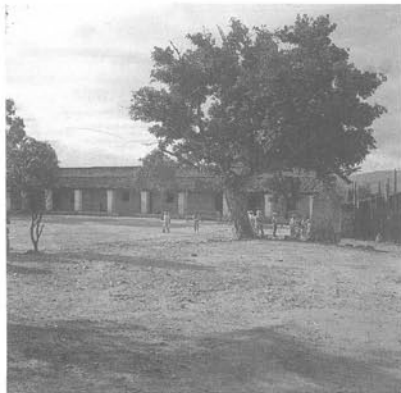
## 1. Atzompa



Independencia Street



Church



School



Plaza on Market Day

## 2. Transportation



The bus to Oaxaca



Fording the river



Road to San Jacinto

left hanging outside the trousers, either loose or with the two ends tied together. Most use the heavy, pointed-toe Oaxaca sandals, and wear a wide-brimmed straw sombrero at all times. Among the younger men, the traditional white, pajama-like costume is being replaced by dark pants, leather belts, and shirts of a more citified cut, tucked inside. They also wear jackets of leather and other materials, while the older men use woolen blankets as protection against the cold. The Mixtec rain cloaks, woven mats with overlapping layers of shredded palm, are still seen, but rubber rain capes are more common.

There is a similar distinction between the generations in respect to women's dress. Older women wear short-sleeved, low-necked cotton blouses, sometimes embroidered, and full, ankle-length skirts. The typical Oaxaca skirt is a solid color, with ribbons of contrasting color sewn around the bottom, but flowered prints are also popular. Younger women prefer a one-piece, factory-made dress, covered by an apron, and they are more apt to wear shoes to church or on trips to the city. The older women invariably go barefoot. Undergarments consist of a long chemise and a sash of maguey fibers, which is wound tightly around the waist, and is considered essential to prevent strain when lifting heavy burdens. Women of all ages, down to the three-year-olds, use the dark cotton *rebozo*, which they wear in a variety of ways—draped over the head and shoulders, twisted into a turban with the ends hanging down, coiled on top of the head to serve as a carrying pad, or folded flat to form a sunshade. They braid their hair with colored ribbons; the braids are tied at the ends and allowed to hang down the back or are wound around the head in a coronet. Earrings, almost the only jewelry, are usually of plain gold. For fiestas, younger women buy silk or satin dresses, which are put to everyday use when they begin to show signs of wear; most try to have an extra *rebozo* of silk for special occasions.

#### EARNING A LIVING

Farming is extensively practiced in Atzompa and is, along with pottery making, the base of subsistence. At least 65 per cent of the men do some farming, and for many of them it constitutes the principal source of income.<sup>4</sup> The staple crops are corn and beans; alfalfa, chickpeas, squash, and other vegetables are also grown.

The village has 198 hectares (494 acres) of arable land, of which 69 hectares are humid or irrigated and 129 are seasonal—dependent on rain for moisture. Those with humid lands can make an early planting in February or March, harvest six months later, and make a second planting in August. Most farmers, however, plant shortly before the first rains, and, although these usually come in April, there are always variations from year to year. When the rains are late, work is delayed and occasionally there is a summer drought, followed by torrential waters which flood out the fields. The land is prepared with a wooden plow and a team of oxen. A man with a large amount of land may rent a tractor to plow his fields, but this is rare. The long-handled Mexican hoe, the spade, and the machete are employed for cultivation, and the sickle for reaping. The whole family turns out to harvest the corn, even the women who do not usually work in the fields. The ears, left in the husk, are harvested first, and brought in to be stored in the house, while the stalks, which serve as fuel, are left to dry and gathered later.

Although Atzompa's lands are fertile, they are insufficient for its needs. Almost every householder owns his own *solar*, the plot of ground in the village on which his house stands, but this is seldom large enough to be cultivated. The agricultural lands (*terrenos*) lie outside the village and tend to be split up into small pieces. Approximately 65 per cent of the families have at least an *almud*, one-seventh of an acre, either from the *ejido* or owned outright, and many hold a great deal more. The remaining 35 per cent, however, are landless and if they wish to farm must do so by a system of sharecropping in which one individual works the land of another and receives half the crop, the other half going to the owner.<sup>5</sup> Sharecropping is apparently often a semi-permanent arrangement between



relatives or *compadres*, and occurs when the owner is, for some reason, unable to work his land--he cannot supply the labor or does not own a team of oxen.

Land can be pawned and is a common means of raising money. The lender works the land of the borrower for a stipulated period and is entitled to all it produces. This option is of little use to the landless man, since his economic position is rarely such that he can afford to advance loans to others. A few men hire themselves out as day laborers (*mozos*) but again the opportunities are limited; most Atzompeños do not farm on a scale large enough to warrant employing anyone outside of their own families.

The majority of farmers have their own ox teams and occasionally a family will own two. The initial outlay for a pair of oxen is high, ranging from 1500 to 2000 pesos, depending on the age of the animals.<sup>6</sup> Oxen are susceptible to several types of disease, and the illness or death of one of them is a serious economic loss. Some men feel that the old team should be sold and a new one purchased every two or three years. Families with both lands and oxen (39 percent in my sample of 69) are economically the most secure, whereas the 31 percent which have neither are among the poorer families of the village. Twenty-six percent have lands but no oxen, and of these half do some farming. Yet they are scarcely better off than people without lands since the cost of renting a team is ten pesos a day and cuts deeply into what can be derived from agriculture. As the wife of one of the men in this category put it, "those of us who have no oxen suffer much."

There is little commercialization of agriculture as Atzompa consumes most of what it produces. Four families in the sample make their living solely from the fields, but they are the exception. Most people farm to meet their own requirements and sell only when they have a surplus. They may take small quantities of squash, corn, or beans to sell in Oaxaca, or they sell in the village to non-farming or land-poor families.

Atzompa has several thousand acres of land suitable for pasture, but herding is not a major economic activity. Families with oxen usually own one or two cows, and a few have flocks of sheep and goats. Almost everyone has a burro, a pig or two, some poultry, and one or more dogs. To my knowledge, there is just one horse in Atzompa, that of the *presidente*. Animals are valuable economic assets, and are generally well cared for, except the dogs. Their usefulness is restricted to guarding the house and they are often left to fend for themselves. Consequently, dogs are apt to be vicious, and men going out after dark carry *machetes* to ward them off. Oxen are considered dangerous by the women, who give them a wide berth when they meet them on the streets.

Pottery is Atzompa's only industry. A few of the women own foot-powered sewing machines and are known as seamstresses, but they have only occasional orders, most people buying their clothes ready-made in the Oaxaca market. All tools, household utensils, and other necessities are purchased in the city or in the markets of nearby towns. There are, however, a number of specialists who offer services of various sorts: two masons, two millers, a couple of tortilla makers, three or four women who do washing and ironing, a man who sets up a temporary barber shop in his yard on Sundays, three curers, five marriage brokers, two cantors and the musicians. Of these, only masonry and milling can be classified as full-time occupations. One of the masons finds most of his work in neighboring villages and the other, at the time I was there, was busy directing the repairs on the church. During this same period, one of the two corn mills was closed for repairs, and the other open for only a few hours a day, forcing many women to make the journey to San Jacinto to have their corn ground.

The musicians are the largest group of part-time specialists. The village has three bands, each made up of eight to a dozen men, which supply the music for religious fiestas, weddings, and funerals. My *compadre* Felipe's band, the Orquesta Aguilar, consists of three horns, three clarinets, two violins, a

### 3. Village Life



Plowing



Bringing in the Harvest



Returning from the mill



Aguilar Band

bass viol, a guitar, a drum, and, on occasion, a tuba and several rattles. The instruments are old, and the players spend long hours practicing and coaching each other. The Orquesta Aguilar goes frequently to San Jacinto, which has no musicians of its own, and it sometimes travels far into the mountains for four-day fiestas in Mixtec villages. The band earns 40 pesos a day when playing at home, 100 when playing in another community, and, in addition, the men receive their food, cigarettes, and all the mezcal they can drink. Traditionally, no money is demanded if the music is for a religious function in Atzompa, but recently one of the orchestras has begun to charge for playing at the fiestas that take place after the church services, a policy which has angered some of the fiesta authorities and caused a good deal of bad feeling. Also, jealousy and accusations of favoritism may arise over the choice of a band to perform during major religious holidays such as Holy Week. There is never any charge for playing at masses or in religious processions.

Although Atzompa does most of its buying and selling in Oaxaca, some commerce is carried on locally. There are approximately a dozen stores (*tiendas*) scattered throughout the village; the number fluctuates, since anyone with enough capital and an extra room in the house may decide to set up a counter and open for business. Most stores are very small, stocking a few staple foods and commodities such as charcoal, kerosene for lamps, candles, and cigarettes. Two specialize in the sale of mezcal and are more properly *cantinas* where the men gather to drink and talk. A greater variety of items can be purchased at the store of the *presidente* on the main street - flour, beans, canned goods, cheese, sugar, chocolate, crackers, candy, and even fireworks. The Atzompa housewife buys in the village minute quantities, so the volume of business is not large, and all of the storekeepers have other occupations, either farming or pottery or both. Women own several of the stores, and in the others it is usually women, or often children, who wait on the customers.

Two butcher shops sell meat twice a week, and a man living near the Calvario kills pigs. One butcher makes twelve-day journeys to obtain animals, sometimes going as far as Vera Cruz, and does his slaughtering in his yard. He is said to be one of the richer men of the village, and both he and his wife came originally from San Jacinto. At least four of the storekeepers are also outsiders who have married village residents.

Tuesday is market day (*día de plaza*) in Atzompa. Merchants, most of them women, arrive early in the morning from surrounding villages and *ranchos* bringing their products--fruits, flowers, garden vegetables, cooked foods, and sweets. Two Oaxaqueñas come weekly to sell vegetables and a woman from San Jacinto sets up her stand of soft drinks and shaved ice. Trading centers around the plaza next to the church, but the women also peddle their wares from door to door. At houses where they have acquaintances or friends, they stop to visit and the bargaining is done to the accompaniment of much joking and laughing. The merchants from other towns come to buy as well as sell, and small quantities of pottery are sold in the plaza. The principal outlets for the ware, however, are in Oaxaca, and the Atzompa market is of distinctly secondary importance for its sale. The weekly or bi-monthly trip to the city to market the pottery is also a shopping expedition for the family; there they buy things that cannot be obtained in the village, or which can be purchased at less cost.

Wage labor plays a minor role. Men without lands occasionally find work in the fields during planting and harvesting. Well-to-do families without sons may hire a young boy to look after the animals. He lives in the household, receives his food and his clothes, and is paid 12 to 15 pesos a month. Other families may also have adults living with them, individuals whose position is halfway between a family member and a servant. These are usually distant relatives, with no means of support or immediate families of their own, who help around the house and the fields in return for their board. Only a few relatively rich Atzompeños can afford to pay a regular wage.



At least six families of my acquaintance have relatives working in Oaxaca. All are men, and they are employed as a laborer in a soft drink factory, as an assistant to the chauffeur in the bus company, as a night watchman for the museum, as a soldier, as a musician in the state band, and one, with more education than most, has a clerical post in the state government. A job in the city usually means that the individual settles there, returning to Atzompa only for weekends and holidays. There seem to be fewer opportunities for women. Several people spoke to me about the chances of finding a place for their daughters as maids, but the influx from the rural areas into Oaxaca over the last ten years has created a labor force which amply fills the demand for domestic servants. To a lesser extent, I believe the same situation prevails for a man looking for work in the city, and it is a rare villager indeed who can achieve white collar or professional status.

In recent years, a new source of employment has been made available through the *bracero* system--going to work as a farm hand in the United States. Although recruitment is not on the same scale as it was during the war years and has never been as heavy in the southern states as in the central regions of Mexico, large North American companies, like those from the Imperial Valley in California, continue to send agents into the villages to contract for laborers, or the villagers get the word that they are in Oaxaca and seek them out there. I have no exact figures on the number that have gone from Atzompa, but I would estimate it to be about 15 per cent, perhaps less.<sup>7</sup> Many more would go if they could. It is looked upon as a very desirable means of accumulating a lot of money in a short time, a sort of get-rich-quick scheme. A man can come back and buy some land, open a store, or build a better house, but it is considered risky. Some contracts include free transportation, but for others a man must bear the costs himself. Red tape may cause delays of as long as two months in reaching the border, and many Mexicans are turned back because of ill health. Others reach the border only to find that the agents have been fraudulent and their papers are not in order. Nevertheless, despite the risks, the men go whenever they can, usually in groups of two to a dozen, and those who have already been across three or four times are eager to go again. Most contracts are for six months, but the men will take one for as short a period as six weeks in the hope of getting an extension. A few have managed to stay on for several years.

The picture which emerges from this sketch of Atzompa's economic institutions is that of a community which is not an independent, self-sufficient unit, but rather is integrated into the broader economy of the region. As will become evident after pottery making is examined, production as well as consumption depends on ties with the outside, particularly with the city of Oaxaca. Within the village there are a limited number of occupations open to an individual, and relatively small amounts of money can be derived from any one of them. Income from occupations, such as storekeeping or playing in the band, supplement what is earned in farming or pottery; by themselves they do not yield enough to support a family. Population pressures on the land, and the techniques of working it, inhibit the development of agriculture, and there are limitations, different in nature but equally restrictive, on the growth of the pottery industry. Thus the economy is not an expanding one, and it is not surprising that the Atzompeños look to the outside, even as far as the United States, for opportunities to improve their position.

Without information about land holdings, the villagers cannot be stratified along an economic continuum with any degree of accuracy. House type is only a rough index of wealth, since some people who otherwise seem to be relatively well off live in tiny *jacales* of cane and thatch, whereas others who appear to be financially less secure have built, or have inherited, large one or two room adobe structures. It was my general impression that while Atzompa has a handful of families who are, by village standards, rich, and another small group at the other extreme who are very poor, the majority live at a somewhat better than subsistence level. Three families clearly are more affluent than the average. In one, income is derived from a store and large land holdings, another specializes in butchering, and in the third, the head of the house went to the States as a poor farmer and returned a wealthy one. All three have built large houses on the main street with plastered walls, floors of stone or concrete, and windows of glass,

and they have furnished them with beds, wardrobes, and other modern conveniences. Several other families are less ostentatious with their money, but situated comfortably enough to travel if they wish, and to send their children to school in Oaxaca.

Most of the villagers live as do the Aguilars. Their income is sufficient to satisfy their immediate needs and even provide a few luxuries like new clothes for a fiesta, but they are in no position to meet the unexpected expenses of a long illness, a crop failure, or the loss of a valuable animal. Although in most cases the farmers are better off than those who are wholly dependent on pottery, many are unable to raise enough to feed themselves and their animals, and are forced to buy corn and fodder between harvests. At the bottom of the heap, economically, are families who hold no lands, do no farming, have no specialty, and have a small number of pottery-producing members in relation to family size. Women living alone with small children, widowed or separated from their husbands, are often poor to the point of not having enough to eat and unable to clothe their children in anything more than rags.

Many Atzompeños are beginning to realize that their standard of living leaves something to be desired. "Why are we so poor?" a man asks me. "Are there people as poor as we are in your country?" And Tía Lina, commenting on someone who objects to his son-in-law because he has no money, "Why should he quarrel with him for that reason when here we are all poor?" Perhaps it is the stories of *braceros* coming back from the United States that are giving the community a general sense of economic want. There is, however, still a recognition of individual differences, certain people being regarded, and pitied, as abnormally poor. Unusual wealth, on the other hand, excites suspicion, especially if it appears to have been acquired suddenly. Statements that a particular person is rich are made almost in the tone of an accusation, frequently accompanied by uncomplimentary remarks, and among people in moderate circumstances there is a tendency to minimize one's own material possessions in comparison with those of one's neighbors. Thus, someone complains that he has only one burro, and is careful to point out that most of the families living nearby have two or three. The Aguilars tell me that one of their neighbors is a rich woman, adding that she is a *fastidiosa*, an irritating one. When I visit this woman and question her about her lands, she admits that she and her husband own some, but hastens to assure me that it is only a few very small pieces, a mere nothing in comparison to the lands of the Aguilars. "Yes, we have an ox team too, but just a little one, not nearly as big as the animals of your *compadre*, Felipe."

The undercurrent of hostility toward the wealthy individual is illustrated by a story about one of the members of the village government who is otherwise respected and liked. His father came to Atzompa from an adjoining community, a poor farmer. He continued so for many years, with no more money than anyone else, until one night a black *bulto* (ghost) appeared to him. What transpired is not known, but that night his wife died and the next morning he woke up to find himself a rich man. His son inherited the money and keeps it in great barrels in a back room of his house. This tale was told to me as a secret which few people know, and as a very ugly affair.

These somewhat negative attitudes toward wealth do not mean that the Atzompeños are unconcerned with getting on in the world or that they do not know the value of money. On the contrary, they are extremely price-minded. "How much did you give for it?" was far and away the most frequent question I was asked, and among themselves the price of anything and everything is a never failing topic of conversation.<sup>8</sup> What it does appear to indicate is a certain fear of rising too far above one's fellows and of laying oneself open to the charge of being selfish, ambitious and grasping, or money loving. The average villager struggles to make a living, and he will go far from home to accumulate a little extra, but he is not motivated by the spirit of competition, and money-making for its own sake is not one of his central values.

## COMMUNITY LIFE

### Government

The *municipio* of Atzompa is an administrative unit consisting of the village, which is the *cabecera* or seat of government, and the three outlying *ranchos* under its jurisdiction. Every adult male is expected to serve the community in one or more government offices. These are structured in the form of a hierarchy, and to reach the top a man must pass through all of them. He begins as a member of the *policía* where for a period of seven years he works his way through various grades until he achieves the rank of *teniente*, a kind of sergeant. He is then eligible for the responsibilities of one of the higher posts--mayordomo, councilman (*regidor*), town attorney (*síndico*), mayor (*presidente municipal*), or judge (*alcalde*). The town is governed by the town council of six *regidores*, the *presidente*, and the *síndico*. The *presidente* represents the municipality in all dealings with the state government and with other communities. Along with the rest of the council, he is in charge of collecting taxes and supervising the maintenance of roads and public buildings by the communal work groups.

At the present time each householder is expected to work one day a week on repairs for the church. Government officials have financial obligations during religious holidays, since their posts are linked to those of the fiesta system. This, and the fact that most are not paid for their services, means that it takes a considerable amount of money to participate in political affairs, and it is not accidental that the *presidentes* have tended to be drawn from among the wealthier men of the village. The man who is presently *alcalde* is only moderately well off, and he complained to me about the heavy expenses he has to bear, especially during Holy Week.

One of the principal tasks of the authorities is that of maintaining law and order in the community. Although the *alcalde* has special judicial functions, the council as a whole sits as a court of justice, to settle disputes, pass judgment on misdemeanors, and impose penalties of fines and imprisonment. Fighting is probably the commonest offense and, when restricted to barehanded combat or throwing stones, usually results in nothing more than a night in the village jail for one or both participants. If *machetes* come into play, the consequences are apt to be more serious and not infrequently end in homicide. Crimes of violence are almost always unpremeditated, occurring at periods when there is a great deal of drinking and when grudges over land, over women, and over incidents that took place many years ago, flare up into active hostilities. Generally it is the men who are involved, but homicide on the part of women is not unknown. About ten years ago a woman killed her husband because he was drunk and threatened to leave her, and quite recently a quarrel between two women who met on the street and started screaming insults at each other was terminated only after one of them had been stabbed to death. Most individuals who have served prison sentences for such crimes have been released and have resumed their places in the community as quiet law-abiding citizens.

Robbery seems to be rare. I was told stories of several robberies that had been committed in the past, and there is a man who currently has the reputation of making off with other people's animals when he can, but I heard of no thefts when I was in the village. Nevertheless, a general atmosphere of suspicion prevails. A family going away from home, even for a few hours, will try to leave some member to guard the house, and, at night, any unusual barking by the dogs is promptly investigated. On one occasion my *compadre* almost shot his eldest sister who was rustling around outside looking for a strayed chicken.

When Atzompa cannot, or does not, handle its own judicial problems, the state government intervenes. I was told that this occurred several years ago when the man who was at that time *presidente*

failed to act in a murder case. Great numbers of police arrived to carry him off to Oaxaca where he was removed from office, jailed, and fined 3000 pesos. Disputes involving other communities must be taken to the capital, and a villager who feels dissatisfied with the decision of the local court will voluntarily go to Oaxaca to seek "better justice."

With the exception of Independence Day on September 16, no national or local civic holidays are celebrated. The birthday of Benito Juárez, marked in Oaxaca with parades and fireworks, is completely ignored in the village. The fiesta of Independencia, which does not rank in importance with the religious fiestas, centers around the school. Short one-act plays and recitations are given by the school children and one of the older girls, chosen to represent "América," sings the national anthem. At midnight the *presidente* reenacts the *Grito de Dolores*, shouting the *vivas* from the porch of the municipal building, the populace echoing them in the traditional manner.

### Education

Atzompa's Federal school has five grades, one grade less than the complete primary program. The teachers, two men and three women, do not live in the village but commute by bus from Oaxaca. School begins at eight in the morning and continues till four, with a two hour recess for lunch. In addition to reading and writing, the children are taught arithmetic, geography, history with the emphasis on Mexico, and something about the structure of the state and federal governments. They are also given a touch of natural science—simple botany and biology, and there is a class in drawing, (*dibujos*), where they learn how to sketch flowers, animals, and human figures. Pottery making is not included in the curriculum although an arithmetic assignment may call for modeling geometric shapes in clay and having them fired at home.

Mexican law requires attendance at primary schools for children between the ages of six and fourteen. There is no mechanism for enforcement, however, and the 1950 census indicates that only 17 per cent of the Atzompa children in this age bracket were enrolled in school. This figure may be an underestimate of the number who actually attend, since it obscures the fact that many go for two or three years, often not starting until they are ten or eleven and dropping out before they have reached the fifth year. Thirty per cent of the population of twenty-five years of age or over has had at least one year of education, and 36 per cent of those over the age of six are literate.<sup>9</sup> Girls are taken out sooner than boys to begin making pottery and, for the same reason, they are more apt not to be sent at all.<sup>10</sup> The sex ratio at the present time is about three to two. Thirty or forty years ago girls never went to school, which accounts for the large proportion of illiterates among the older women.

Those who continue their education beyond the fifth year go to San Jacinto, which has a school of seven grades, or to Oaxaca where they can attend a state supported boarding school for as little as six pesos a month. Whether or not children are sent outside of the village for more schooling is determined less by their desires and abilities than by the attitude and financial situation of the parents. Most families, if they value education at all, regard two or three years as plenty and are unable, even when willing, to afford to lose the income a child can contribute by working at home in pottery or farming. In general, advanced education is restricted to the few whose parents are relatively rich, or who have siblings who can take their places as economically productive members of the household. Again, it is the boys who can be more easily spared.

The significance of formal education is difficult to assess. Literacy undoubtedly gives a man an advantage in his business dealings, particularly in Oaxaca, and is supposed to be a requirement for holding office in local government. Lack of schooling probably makes less difference to woman, who seem to know the value of the peso and how to drive a hard bargain without the benefit of a course in arithmetic. Education seems to make the greatest difference for those who have gone far enough to be



able to fit themselves for some occupation other than those available in Atzompa. These are people who have been to school in Oaxaca and they do not come back--the young man who now works for the state government and the son of another family who is a teacher, in Teotitlan de Valle. Education is viewed as a way out, rather than as a means of achievement within the matrix of village culture, but it is a way available only to a few. The rest, limited to what the village school has to offer, learn to read and write if they attend more than one year, and not, so far as I could judge, much more.

### The Church and the Fiesta System

The Catholic church is an integral part of daily life and, forms the focal point for a series of elaborate fiestas that occur at stated intervals during the year. Because there is no resident priest, many religious activities are organized and carried out by local functionaries: *cantores*-singers, *rezadores*-prayers, *cofradías* - fraternal organizations, and *mayordomos*-ceremonial sponsors.

The priest responsible for ministering to the spiritual needs of the villagers is from the Marquesado parish in Oaxaca. He officiates during the religious holidays, and a teaching priest comes out to say Mass and give communion the first Friday of every month. There are other masses from time to time, paid for by the *mayordomos*, but no regular Sunday service and anyone wishing to attend must go into Oaxaca. All weddings and most baptisms are performed in Oaxaca, and funerals take place without the benefit of clergy since few can afford to hire the priest to make a special trip to the village. Atzompa receives an occasional visit from one of the higher prelates, as when the archbishop arrives in January to confirm the children.

The two religious associations, *el Rosario* and *Acción Católica*, include both men and women, but they do not enjoy a very large membership. Rosario has thirty-two members and is in charge of evening services, one daily at five for women, and another later on for men. These are lightly attended except in the month of May when mothers bring their small daughters in white confirmation dresses and veils to offer flowers to the Virgin. Catholic Action is supposed to take over the services on Saturday and Sunday, and to hold classes after school to teach children their catechism. In Oaxaca it is a strong organization with conservative political tendencies, but in the village it seems to be in danger of withering away. Although the necessity of joining is a frequent theme in sermons, Catholic Action has been losing members and is now down to three. Both organizations are criticized for being too prone to quarreling and factionalism.

Atzompa's religious calendar has one or more fiestas for every month of the year. Of these, six are of major importance: the fiesta of the Virgin of Ocotlan on January 15; Carnival, which marks the beginning of Lent; Holy Week; the fiesta of the Virgin of Asunción, patroness of the village, whose day is celebrated August 15; the fiesta of the Virgin of Rosario, which falls on the first Sunday in October; and *Todos Santos*, All Saints' Day, on November 1. Each has distinctive features but, with the exception of Holy Week and *Todos Santos*, they follow a general pattern that can be illustrated by a brief description of one of them. I have chosen Rosario since the Aguilers took part in it, and I was able to observe it more closely than some of the others.

Preparations begin in April when the retiring *mayordomo* delivers the wax candles of the saint to his successor and gives a small feast. Also present are the new *comisionado*, who functions in much the same way as the *mayordomo*, and the *ayudante* whose job it is to collect money. Tomás Aguilar is *ayudante* this year and to aid him he has a *demandante* and two assistants. Every second Thursday these men are sent through the village with the *Virgen de la limosna*, a small image with a bank in the back, and each family is expected to contribute five to ten centavos, or its equivalent in some staple food that can be sold. After making the rounds the men return to the *ayudante's* to count the money, which may amount to as much as twenty pesos, and to drink *tejate*, beverage of ground corn and chocolate prepared by the women

#### 4. Fiestas



Procession for Rosario



Announcing a Fiesta



Altar on Patron Saint's Day

the fiesta are accumulated over a period of six months, the remainder of the expenses being born by the *mayordomo* and *comisionado*.

Starting nine days before the celebration, there is a nightly *Vía Cruz* or *Convite*, invitation. The fiesta officials gather at the church to take out the saint and march in procession with lanterns and a band. They make a slow circuit of the village, stopping to sing and pray at the stations of the cross, stone niches set at intervals along the main streets. The music and lights attract little attention, although a few people come to their gates to watch them pass.

Friday night is the beginning of the fiesta proper. Since late afternoon the Aguilers have been busily sweeping and scrubbing, getting themselves and the house ready for the coming of the *calenda*. This is a procession made up of the *madrinas* (godmothers) of the fiesta, young girls dressed in their best and carrying baskets entwined with artificial flowers. They arrive about eight o'clock, soaking wet as it is raining hard, and accompanied by the musicians and a crowd of their relatives. The girls and women pour into the big room, quite filling it, and the men congregate outside. Tiny glasses of mezcal are passed out, then bowls of *cerveza de piña*, a watery concoction made from pineapple skin. There is much chattering and laughing, and more amusement when I try to take pictures with my flash camera. When all have been served, the *madrinas* pick up their baskets, the musicians fall into place, and the *calenda* moves on, for they have other houses to visit, those of the *comisionado* and *mayordomo*. Customarily they would also go to the *presidente* and the *alcalde*, but word has come that these officials are not prepared to receive them.

Saturday evening we go to Vespers at the church. It is lit with dozens of candles strung on wires and decorated with the flowered baskets of the *calenda*. Only a handful of people are present, mostly women, and, as the priest has come out from Oaxaca, some take the opportunity to confess. After the service there is a lull until the fireworks display, so most families go home, although small groups of men are drinking under the porticos of the school.

In Atzompa the fireworks are set off at midnight or later and people try to snatch a few hours sleep before going to see them. The sound of rockets at the church is the signal that fireworks are about to begin, so in the Aguilar household we wake each other and stumble up in the darkness to the school yard where a large crowd has assembled and the musicians are playing. The main event is the *castillo*, a towering structure that goes off in a bewildering blaze of light and color. First however, some of the men dance with paper maché figures which they hold over their shoulders, turkeys whose tails are pinwheels and bulls spurting sparks in all directions. The men dance well, although I'm told that they are drunk, and there is much horseplay as they hand the fire-spitting animals from one to another or struggle for their possession. When the crown of the *castillo* has shot into the air and the last pinwheel has died away, it is after two in the morning and the people disperse to their homes.

Sunday, high mass is celebrated at ten o'clock and the church is jammed, the women kneeling in the front and the men standing at the back. The priest says he is glad to see so many Christians and speaks at length about the rosary, God's greatest gift to man, given to cure the ills of the soul. Earlier, the Aguilers have been receiving guests for breakfast, the *demandante*, his assistants and their families who come for their hot chocolate and bread. The men gather to drink in the big room and the women cluster in the open kitchen, helping with the preparation of the main dish—turkey with a rich molé sauce of chocolate and chilé. The other fiesta officials are entertaining in their houses in a similar manner. In the afternoon the Virgin of Rosario is carried in state around the village with incense, banners, and music. Monday, there is another mass and the festivities continue in the house of the *comisionado*. My *compadre* and his wife do not attend, but Tomás and his sister, Tía Lina, have been there all afternoon. Towards evening the family tells one of the children to go and see if they are drunk, and if so, to bring them home.

By Tuesday Rosario is officially over, although the drinking may go on, and the following Sunday the *mayordomo* must spend again on a feast.

In its broad outlines, Rosario typifies the fiesta pattern in Atzompa. Some celebrations are shorter and less elaborate, while others have special features--the brush fires lit in the streets for Candlemas on February 2 or the blessing of the wells on Holy Cross Day in May. The fiesta of the patron saint in August is probably the most expensive of the religious holidays, requiring twenty-six officials to finance it, and the most commercialized. Mixtecs come down from the mountains selling fruit and flowers, and people from surrounding villages arrive to trade, as well as for the spectacles. Horsemen are hired from San Jacinto for the *carreras*, races in which the riders attempt to catch rings on a pole and to lasso a live chicken suspended from a rope. Usually a small fair is brought across the river in trucks and set up in the school yard. The year I was there the height of the water prevented the vehicles from passing. Without the *diversiones*, the merry-go-round and the games of chance, the fiesta was pronounced very sad, by the younger members of the community.

Holy Week deviates from the usual pattern and is more solemn in tone. It consists of a series of dramatic and literal representations of the events which led up to the Crucifixion--the entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the Last Supper and the washing of the apostles' feet on Thursday, and the judgment, jailing and crucifixion on Friday, climaxed by a night procession of the whole village to carry the wooden figure of Christ in his coffin to the Calvario. Mass is said on Saturday and again on Sunday when the church bells, silent for six days, are rung for the first time. *Todos Santos* also lasts a week and includes *el día de los difuntos*, the Day of the Dead, when offerings are made to the departed members of the family. This fiesta is regarded as one of the most beautiful of the year and was described to me many times--how the food is set out on the graves at night for the *difuntos* who are supposed to come and how the cemetery is all a *gloria* with the candles and the flowers.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the fiesta system to the villagers. In spite of their relative poverty, they pour into it time, money, and energy, and in return it provides them with almost the only excitement and drama that enters into their lives. Carnival, Holy Week, the patron saint's day are talked about for weeks beforehand--what will happen, who will participate, what new clothes can be bought--and are rehashed for days afterwards. As they bring outsiders into the village, fiestas have an economic function, although less so than in some other parts of Mexico, and they are definitely not a tourist attraction like those of Oaxaca city. The heavy drinking that goes on during these periods is an additional source of pleasure and escape, although the consequences are often unfortunate. Much of the drinking is ritual in nature and is kept within bounds, but there are always some, especially the older men, who "*toman como cochis*" ("drink like pigs"); so that a holiday rarely passes without a serious fight.

As yet, fiestas show few signs of diminution or decline. A few elements have dropped out or been modified, one being the traditional costumed dances. Twenty-five years ago, the Dance of the Conquest was a part of the religious celebrations, but today, it is no longer performed, and there are only teenage boys in pasteboard masks who follow some of the processions, teasing and frightening people. The character of the feasts given by the *mayordomos* in their homes has also changed. Formerly, these were public affairs with food and drink for anyone who came. Now each family prepares and eats the fiesta foods at home, and the *mayordomo's* party is restricted to the other fiesta officials and their families, a change perhaps necessitated by the increasing size of the community. A third shift, potentially more threatening to the survival of the system, seems to be the tendency for government to disassociate itself from religious activity. I have only indirect evidence for this--the fact that the *presidente* and *alcalde* often did not participate in their official capacity, their refusal to receive the procession of Rosario, the complaints of the *alcalde* about his expenses. Yet it is a change which, for economic reasons, is going on in other villages in the area and may well be starting to take place in Atzompa.<sup>11</sup>



The influence of the Catholic church, apart from the fiesta system, does not seem to be very great. In his sermons the priest attempts to impress on the Atzompeños some of the tenets of orthodox Christianity. They are told that the village is full of corruption, and the answer lies in the church, that the youngest child or the most ignorant peasant, who knows his catechism, is wiser than the wisest scholar who does not. They are chastised for their excessive drinking, "a wicked custom that does not please God," and for quarreling and gossiping. "In each house in Atzompa there is evil talk of all the others." They are repeatedly reminded of the lessons to be drawn from the sufferings of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints. These admonitions have relatively slight effect, due in part to the fact that the priest does not live in the village and is regarded as a highly respected but somewhat distant figure. Attendance at church also indicates a certain indifference to the requirements ordinarily considered a part of the Catholic religion. Women go more regularly than men, and seem to regard church service as more a pleasure than a duty. It is a break in the daily routine which they will take if they can afford the time. It is a rare person, either man or woman, who will make the trip to the city on Sunday to attend mass, and the average family will pass up a mass in the village when it interferes with the work schedule.

If the church organizations are criticized, if the ritual forms are not always observed, and if the church does not guide behavior in the manner desired by the priest, religion has, at least, fostered a state of mind in which God is seen as the prime mover in all facets of life. When the rains are late, it is the castigation of the Lord, and the saints are taken to the river. When a child has a physical defect, it is a punishment for the sins of the parents. Any kind of misfortune--illness, death, crop failure--must be accepted without resentment because it is "as God commands". The same fatalistic attitude toward the possibility of person controlling his destiny is reflected in the answer given to many questions, "*Solo Dios*," Only God (knows). Occasionally there are concrete instances of Divine intervention. Lights have flared up mysteriously before the images of saints when no one has been in the church and have been declared miracles. Other images are "miraculous" for their power to bring the rains. People who work on saints' days run the risk of being struck down by the wrath of heaven, as happened some years ago to a man who was killed by lightning.

## FAMILY AND PERSONAL LIFE

### Daily Routine

In Atzompa, the average household is composed of a married couple with two children. There is a wide range in size, however, from the single person living alone to couples with as many as nine offspring. When sons marry, they continue to live with their parents until they can build their own houses, which is done as soon as possible. Sometimes this is a separate establishment in another part of the village, but more often it is located close to that of the groom's parents on the same plot (*solar*). Thus, while each nuclear family tends to have its own dwelling unit, many *solares* represent three generations or are made up of an extended family of brothers with their wives and children who remain together after the old people have died. A widow living with one of her married sons is another common arrangement. Inheritance is through the male line, although if the property is large it may be divided equally, the daughters receiving a part of the *solar* and some of the agricultural lands.

The typical house consists of one large room or two small ones. As there are seldom any windows, it is dark and poorly ventilated, the light entering only through the door, or a cane screen set into one of the walls. *Jacales* built entirely of cane have better light and air than the adobe structures, but they are apt to get uncomfortably cold during the winter months. Floors are dirt, kept smooth by sprinkling them with water, and thatch roofs need yearly repairs to prevent them from leaking. Furnishings are simple: straw mats, which are rolled up in the daytime and put down for sleeping at night, the carved or painted bride's chest where good clothes and valuables are stored, a chair reserved

## 5. Domestic Life



Patio



Front view of house



Making tortillas



Eating in the Kitchen at Night

for guests and otherwise serving as a table, and small, low stools, used by the men, the women preferring to sit on the floor. A large pile of unhusked corn, the family's food supply, occupies one corner of the room, and more space is taken up by the pottery currently being worked. Baskets and clothes hang from the ceiling or from hooks on the walls, and calendars, three or four, years old are tacked up along with the children's school drawings. An invariable feature in every household is the altar, a rough table or a couple of boards laid across poles, with holy pictures, vases of flowers, and frequently a small image with a candle burning in front of it. Mixed in with the religious objects are odds and ends of all sorts—knickknacks, needles and thread, combs, bits of ribbon, matches, the flashlight if the family owns one.

During the rainy season vermin become a problem. Lice and fleas breed in the mats, which have to be aired to get them out, while other insects, mice, and an occasional scorpion find their way into the house. Yet most houses are neat and clean, considering the crowded living and working conditions, the chickens and dogs that wander in and out, and the lack of a definite place to put anything away. This last seemed to cause a great deal of difficulty for the Aguilar. The scissors, someone's *rebozo*, a pair of earrings would disappear for days, and there were frantic questions to each other as to the location of the object. If it was a small item, it usually turned up on the altar.

Cooking is done outside in a thatched lean-to. Three stones make the hearth where the tortillas are toasted on a flat clay griddle, the *comal*, over a blaze of corn stalks; a metal brazier heated by charcoal provides additional cooking space. Next to the hearth stands the three-legged grinding stone (*metate*), and, piled around it or on a shelf overhead is the rest of the kitchen equipment—baskets for holding ground corn and tortillas, fire fans, a couple of wooden stirring spoons, a knife or two, and a variety of pottery utensils, many produced in the village. The kitchen is a center of activity even when a meal is not being prepared and eaten, as there is more light, and often more room, than there is in the interior of the house. The children gather there to play, the men to talk and do odd jobs, such as repairing their tools, and the women to do their household tasks. Some find it a more convenient place to work pottery.

Very few families have a real patio, although the yard surrounding the house may be referred to by that term. Here, the burros and pigs are tethered, and the oxen when they are not in the fields. There is a specific spot where the weekly wash is done and hung out, another where the kiln is situated and many of the steps involved in pottery making are performed. There may be a couple of fruit trees and each family has its flowers planted in pots or tin cans which are carefully tended. All trash is thrown behind the house and this area also serves as a latrine. The front part of the yard is kept reasonably tidy and in the dry season is a pleasant place to work. When the rains come, however, the patio becomes a sea of mud, and tasks normally carried on outside must be done indoors.

The daily routine of a family varies somewhat with the seasons and with their occupation. In general, Atzompeños are not early risers and in the Aguilar household, unless the kiln is to be fired, it is six-thirty or seven before anybody is up and about. The men go to look after the animals, while the women start breakfast, patting out the tortillas and calling to one of the boys to bring more corn stalks to feed the blaze. Fourteen year old Nacho eats quickly as he has to get to school, but for the rest of the family the meal is a rather leisurely affair. Coffee, sweetened with sugar, and tortillas with chile, and perhaps a bit of cheese brought from the store by Esperanza, the daughter of thirteen, are taken on ordinary mornings. Chocolate and bread are reserved for Sundays and fiestas.

After breakfast, Lorenzo and José yoke up the oxen and go off to the fields. My *compadre*, Felipe, does not work there as much as he used to, now that he has two grown sons to help him with the farming. However, he may have work duties at the church or an errand that takes him to Oaxaca on the eleven o'clock bus. Esperanza hurries to get the corn to the mill before it closes down, and when she returns with the ground maize, her older sister, María makes the tortillas that will be needed for the day. Although the mechanical mill saves much time formerly spent in grinding, it still requires an hour or so

to turn out enough of the flat corn cakes to satisfy a family of nine. My *comadre* hastily rinses out the coffee bowls and settles down to the pottery. Her eldest daughter, Chica, joins her after feeding the chickens and throwing half of a tortilla to each of the hungry dogs. By the middle of the morning all the women of the house are hard at work on the clay.

The main meal of the day occurs anywhere from one o'clock to four, depending on when the women have stopped their work to get it ready and what time the men come in from the fields. A large plate of beans with an egg or a small piece of meat fried in garlic and oregano is the usual fare, varied by the vegetables, in season--peas cooked in sauce, squash, tomatoes, or leaves of the cactus plant. The tortillas made earlier are heated on the *comal*. Again, the family take their time to eat, seated around the hearth, using sticks to drive off the dogs who circle eagerly in the background. Esperanza probably makes several more trips to the store, or to the plaza if it is Tuesday, to buy items that are wanted at the last minute.

Work on the pottery is resumed in the late afternoon and continues into the evening with only a brief break for a supper of coffee, beans and tortillas. When he returns from school at dusk, Nacho is sent off for water, which he brings the four blocks from the well in two large gasoline tins swung from a pole across his shoulders. Later, he may go up to church, the girls having attended the five o'clock service, but more likely he takes his school books into the back room where his sisters are working by the flickering light of candles and tiny kerosene lamps. The older boys are out somewhere, and my *comadre*, working in the front room, berates her husband for allowing her sons to wander around the village after dark--"God only knows what trouble they could be getting into". Tía Lina drifts over from the other house to relate the latest bit of gossip she has picked up and eventually Lorenzo and José come in, none the worse for their nocturnal jaunt. By nine o'clock the youngest children have fallen asleep and been put to bed. The men retire earlier than the women, but by ten or ten-thirty the pottery has been put away for the night and the house is quiet.

A change in the normal routine occurs at the periods of sowing and harvesting. The men rise earlier and spend all day in the fields, and the women must find the time to bring their lunch to them. Sundays also bring a break in the usual schedule. The men do not go to the fields except to pasture the animals, and the women do not work as steadily on the pottery--ideally they do not work at all, as it is supposed to be a day of rest. The house is tidied and swept out, and the weekly washing is done, sometimes at home, but if the weather is fair, in one of the small streams or irrigation ditches outside the village. These provide a plentiful supply of water, and a bath can be taken after the clothes are spread out to dry. The custom of washing and ironing on Sunday is apparently unique to Atzompa and due to the fact that the potters have little opportunity for it on other days of the week; it is looked upon somewhat askance by women from other communities.

Little work is done during the days of fiesta, and the diet is more diversified. Rice, turkey, and chicken are fiesta foods, and greater quantities of meat are eaten. Tamales of molé are a favorite dish at *Todos Santos* as is fish fried in beaten egg during Holy Week. Beer, soft drinks, and *tepache* made from fermented pineapple juice and brown sugar are served, along with mezcal. Even on holidays, however, the tortilla forms the basis of the meal. It is considered the most strengthening and satisfying of all foods, and Atzompeños are always amazed to learn that people of other countries are able to survive without it.

As a work unit, the family functions with reasonable smoothness and efficiency. Each member has certain tasks to perform and usually does them with a minimum of prompting or nagging on the part of the others. Women have a greater work load than men and, among them, the division of labor differs from one household to another. At the Aguilers, my *comadre* turns over the majority of the domestic chores to her three older girls and devotes herself almost exclusively to pottery. In other families the



daughters may be the full-time potters, while their mother does the cleaning, cooking, and marketing. Not all families are so fortunate as to have four adult women to share the work. Where the children are too young to be useful, or are predominately male, a woman has serious difficulty in filling the dual role of potter and housewife. Such was the situation for Rosa López who had her husband and six grown sons to care for, and only a twelve-year old daughter to help her, until one of the sons finally married. The bride was warmly received by her in-laws as a welcome and much needed addition to the family circle.

Whether or not an extended family that shares a *solar* carries on daily activities as a single group depends on its composition. In the Aguilar *solar*, daily activities carried on by Tomás and his son are separated from those of Felipe and his family. Tía Lina, with the aid of her older sister, does the cooking for Tomás and his son, and only on feast days or special occasions do they join with Felipe's family to prepare and eat their food. This seems to be the practice when two brothers share a *solar*, even where there are fewer women in the two households. In the two generation *solares* the mother and daughter-in-law cooperate in the housework, although there are some who feel this can be an unhappy arrangement as each woman has her own *modo*--her own way of doing things. Sometimes the two *modos* do not mix well. In at least two cases I know of, they did not mix at all, and tension rose to the point where the young couple went to live with her parents instead of his.

### Kinship and *Compadrazgo*

The nuclear family is tightly knit by bonds of affection and obligation. In theory, the man is the absolute head of the house, guiding and controlling the lives of the other members as well as being responsible for their safety and welfare. Actually, neither his wife nor his children are entirely subservient to his authority, and he may be purposely kept in ignorance of much that goes on. Children, in turn, have a responsibility to their parents when they become aged and infirm. The relationship is regarded as, and usually is, a very close one, particularly with the mother. Ties are somewhat broken at marriage, but adults who have long been settled with families of their own may refer to themselves as alone (*solito*), because their parents are dead. The Torres brothers, men of forty who call themselves orphans, are perhaps an extreme example of filial sentiment. Siblings, especially of the opposite sex, are not as close to each other. Although brothers are supposed to take the place of parents in looking after their sisters, and supporting them if the latter do not marry, they cannot always be trusted to do so.

Intra-family quarrelling does occur and, when tempers flare, there are apt to be blows struck, as the men become abusive and not all women submit tamely. At the same time, there is a definite effort to put up an united front, and to minimize or ignore the friction that inevitably arises from close quarters and constant contact. Family life also offers social satisfactions of a very real kind, and members seem to derive much enjoyment from each other's company.

Outside of the immediate family, spatial proximity seems to be the principal determinant of intimacy between relatives. With cousins, uncles and aunts who live in the same *solar* or next door there is daily interaction. The children play together and the women visit back and forth, but the married brother or sister, who lives a few blocks away, may be seen rarely. Kinship does not seem to involve any formal obligations other than coming to help during fiestas, nor does it, by itself, insure peace and amicability between individuals. Many people are on very cool terms with their near relations, openly criticizing or expressing disapproval, and some are quite frankly antagonistic.

Cutting across kinship lines, and in some respects more meaningful, is *compadrazgo*, the system of ritualized friendships between the parents and godparents (*padrinos*) of a child. This relationship is marked by warmth, respect, and consideration. *Compadres* are invited to all social functions to which they contribute gifts of food and money. In times of trouble one turns to one's *compadres* for advice and support. A similar tie is formed between godparents and godchild, and the former may take the role of

disciplinarian. Of the many types of *padrinos* recognized in Atzompa, the most important for the individuals concerned are those of baptism. The godparents buy the christening clothes, arrange and pay for the funeral if the child dies, and are responsible for raising him in the event that he is left without relatives. Everybody also has *padrinos* of confirmation and usually one other set--of the first communion, of the candle, of the *limosna*, or of the scapulary. The last four types carry no particular duties but are sought if the child seems ailing, in the hope that the spiritual forces of the godparents will help him regain his health; or they may be used simply to institutionalize a relationship with someone the parents wish to draw into their circle of close friends. Although there is no rule against relatives, *padrinos* are more frequently chosen outside of the family and there is a tendency to pick them from among the more well-to-do. Most Atzompeños have at least one set of *compadres* in Oaxaca city.

*Compadrazgo* plays a central role at marriage and again at death. The *padrinos* of baptism give the bride her *metate*, and those of confirmation her wedding chest. Two new sets are selected by the groom to participate in the ceremony and act as witnesses, while the parents of the couple automatically become *compadres*--it is considered a respectful way of addressing in-laws. For the Raising of the Cross, which takes place nine days after death, two *madrinas* sponsor a fiesta, and finally, there are *padrinos* of things--new houses, wells, and even horse races. *Compadrazgo* enters into every phase of an individual's life, constituting a sort of social insurance that provides financial aid and emotional support for important events and crises. It is also a strong cohesive force in the village, pulling it together, and helping to mitigate the atmosphere of suspicion and hostility that too often threatens to split it into separate family groups.

### Early Years

Infant mortality is high. I have no recent statistics for Atzompa, but the figures from the 1950 Mexican census indicate that almost one half of the children die within their first year, some at birth due to unsanitary conditions, others from diseases contracted soon afterwards. Although there are no trained midwives in the village, several of the older women "know about such things" and are called in to assist. They charge from 12 to 40 pesos for their services and one of them is also a curer. Custom demands that the placenta be treated with great care since any dirt falling on it will cause the child to go blind. It is washed, wrapped in a clean rag, put into a clean jar, and buried in a corner of the room. If at a later time the child is having eye problems, it is dug up, rewashed, and buried again.<sup>12</sup> Today, some women go into Oaxaca city to have their babies in hospitals but, aside from the expense, many consider it a dangerous thing to do. "The doctors do not know their business; they cut and then forget where."

The baby is baptized a few days after birth to make certain that it will enter heaven as an a little angel if it dies. The name, picked from the religious calendar, is usually that of one of the saints on whose day the baby was born, while another, which pleases the parents better, may be added. Names are shortened or changed for daily use. Francisca becomes Chica or Pancha; Concepción, Concha; Atonacio, Nacho; Tomás, Lente. Hernando and Ofelia, the two youngest Aguilar children, are euphoniously known as Memo and Mema.

Everyone displays a great deal of affection toward the baby, playing with it, kissing it, talking to it. Men are hardly less demonstrative than women, and boys vie with their sisters to hold the *nene*. During the rare times when it is out of someone's arms, it is laid in a net cradle suspended from the ceiling. At night, the baby sleeps on the mat with its mother. She suckles it whenever it cries and regardless of where she happens to be. Most children are weaned by the age of two, but it is not uncommon to see older children given the breast. My *comadre* nursed her five-year-old whenever the latter was sick or upset, and the act seemed to have a calming effect on both of them. Toilet training is equally gradual, the child being encouraged to go out into the yard but not punished for accidents in the house.



## 6. Children



In view of the attention they receive, it is not surprising that children of three or four are somewhat spoiled. They compete for the favor of adults, are jealous of younger siblings, and protest vigorously against the discomfort of being washed or combed. Temper tantrums, when they occur, are handled by ignoring them or trying to shame the children into good behavior--calling them weepers, and telling them they have the faces of turtles or little pigs. Other disciplinary techniques are teasing, striking, the withdrawal of love, and threats that the *gringos* are coming. This last is very effective, as all young children have a lively fear of strange North Americans. Punishment of any kind is not often necessary, especially after the age of five. Most children are well behaved, respectful and obedient to their elders, and willing to wait on them. They adapt themselves easily to adult society, because they have been a part of it since the day they were born. They are taken everywhere and considered good company, which they are, and adequate chaperons. A woman will go with a child to places where she might feel uncomfortable or unsafe alone.

Much of the children's play consists of imitating and learning adult tasks. Boys like to go to the fields with their fathers and older brothers, and girls are interested in trying their hand at tortillas, patting at little balls of dough which their mothers duly cook for them. There are few toys. A girl may have a home-made corn-cob doll and boys enjoy tops when they can get them, but the most entertaining plaything is the baby. Much of a child's time is spent in caring for younger siblings. By thirteen or fourteen an individual, unless attending school, is a full working member of the household, and a few of that age have already married. The village offers little in the way of recreation for young people. At dusk groups of teen-age boys stroll about the streets or gather at the corners, to talk, smoke, play marbles, and make comments on the women who pass. Girls are kept in the house as much as possible, and find their chief source of amusement in going to church or making a trip to Oaxaca with their parents.

## Marriage

Boys and girls do not go out together unchaperoned, so opportunities for getting acquainted are limited to family social functions or to casual and apparently accidental encounters on the streets. Properly, a girl has no sweetheart until she is engaged, and if she is seen too often lingering in the streets with different boys, she quickly acquires a doubtful reputation. The most socially approved type of marriage is one in which the boy makes a formal suit for the girl of his choice. He informs his parents and they send a go-between to her father to do the asking. It is considered appropriate that the go-between make a number of visits; quick settlements are unseemly. Occasionally, the offer is made through one of the older women of the girl's family, an aunt or a grandmother, but this, too, is bad form. The girl has the power of refusal regardless of her father's views, and she can, if she is strong-willed and has the support of other relatives, accept a man of whom he disapproves.

Once the arrangements have been completed, there is an announcement of the betrothal. The girl's parents give a fiesta to which the relatives of the *novio* come with gifts of bread, chocolate, and turkey. The marriage may be delayed for two or three years if the girl's family feels she is too young or if the groom needs time to accumulate some money. The civil ceremony takes place first and is quietly performed in Oaxaca with only the parents in attendance. By itself, marriage by law means very little and in the time intervening between it and the religious wedding, anywhere from a few days to several months, the status of the couple does not change. The groom continues to call at the house and sees the girl only in the company of others.

The religious ceremony and the fiesta following it (*fandango*), is an elaborate affair starting on Sunday and lasting till the middle of the week. It begins when the groom arrives at five o'clock in the morning with the musicians and a crowd of friends and relatives to collect the bride. As many as can jam into a taxi to go to the church service in Oaxaca and then return for the wedding breakfast. The bride, resplendent in white satin, and the groom, somewhat stiff in his black suit, kneel to receive her father's

blessing before the family altar, and the go-between gives a short speech on the duties of marriage. Throughout, he acts as a kind of master of ceremonies, arranging the principals and making sure that everyone does the correct thing. The *padrinos* of the marriage are also very much in evidence, but the parents remain in the background. After the benediction, the couple and the groom's guests go in procession to his house, the bride's guests following later, and the afternoon is spent in drinking, eating, and dancing. The second day is similar to the first, with feasting in both houses and processions between them, rather like a symbolic merging of the two families. The metate and the wedding chest are danced through the streets and the other gifts presented--new china, cloth, animals, and money. The third day the fiestas are separate, and the bride does not visit her parents. Although the drinking and dancing may be continued for another twenty-four hours, by Wednesday the *fandango* is officially over.

The heavy expenses of a *fandango*, all born by the groom and his family, account in part for the prevalence of the second type of marriage. Here, the boy does not ask for the girl but simply carries her to his house. Although known as robbery, it is done with her consent, and is also used if long delays seem likely, or parental opposition is too strenuous. The girl is kept hidden for several days, then the boy's relatives go to her father with cigarettes and mezcal to ask his pardon. Usually, he accepts the accomplished fact and the couple continues living together in a socially recognized union. Later, they may be married by law but this is not considered essential, unless there is to be a religious wedding too. In some cases a settlement is not made; the girl's father remains adamant or the boy changes his mind, and she is returned to her family. Incidents of this kind account for much of the bad blood that exists in Atzompa, and they frequently end up in the courts. On the other hand, if a girl has accepted expensive presents or given her photograph to a suitor whom she subsequently rejects, he or his family may take the matter to the court and it becomes "a very malodorous thing, a dishonor."

Most girls marry young, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, and some earlier. Those who wait until they are in their twenties, or who do not marry at all, are said to be staying home to dress the saints. This is not universally regarded as an unfortunate fate, for as one older woman cynically put it, "Sometimes it is better to stay home to dress the saints than marry to undress drunks." A girl looks for steadiness and kindness in a husband; he should care for her and the children, give her enough money to dress herself decently, and not drink excessively or abuse her. Supposedly, physical attractiveness is of little consequence although men have been refused on the grounds that they are "already old and ugly." The girl, in her turn, is judged less by her appearance than by whether or not she is thought to be "honorable." If she has been closely guarded, not seen talking on the streets, and kept much in the house, she is apt to receive many offers. Yet, one who has been "stolen" and returned, and is admittedly not a virgin, will find a husband without undue difficulty. Men differ in regard to the value they place on chastity, just as they differ in how much freedom they allow their wives after marriage. Any man, however, has the right to expect an outward show of obedience, and the girl's abilities as a housekeeper are also important. Quite a few men marry out, taking their wives from the *ranchos* or other villages, and some say it is because the women of Atzompa are not taught how to wash, cook, or even make tortillas--they know nothing but pottery.

The stability of a marriage does not appear to be affected by a church ceremony or the lack of it. Unions of both types are apt to be brittle and easily broken. Some couples separate after six months, either because one of them is attracted to another person or because the wife refuses to submit to her husband's domination. Drinking and beating are by far the most frequent reasons for a woman to leave. Few bother to legalize the separation, since in a Catholic country divorce is difficult and expensive, and most soon form a second alliance which is often more stable than the first. If this relationship is permanent, the children are not considered illegitimate. Adultery on the part of those who remain together is not uncommon and several men in the village maintain two households. For at least one of the women, economic circumstances are probably a factor, as she has left a drunken husband and is struggling to support herself and a number of small children. Her position excites criticism as well as

pity. Why, it is asked, does she not look for a bachelor or a widower instead of a married man. In general, a woman is censured less for sexual immorality than for neglecting or deserting her children. Similarly, a man who has the reputation of being very susceptible, or of keeping two women, does not lose status, unless he fails to recognize and support the children that result from his extra-marital activities.

Atzompeños joke a great deal about marriage. Children are teased about their future *novios*, and they retaliate by suggesting improbable mates for their elders. A man who has been refused by many women is ridiculed for his failure to obtain a wife, and a woman will greet a girl who is a former sweetheart of one of her sons as daughter-in-law, and then laugh heartily at the girl's embarrassment.

### Sickness, *Susto*, and Witchcraft

Smallpox, typhoid, malaria, tuberculosis, and various types of dysentery are among the more serious diseases which afflict the villagers. They also suffer from colds, sore throats, and digestive disorders. Women complain of headaches and sore eyes, which may be the result of working pottery in poor light. Alcohol takes its toll, and there is some awareness of its harmful effects. Illness always increases in the rainy season "because of all the water" and during the months of June and July there is scarcely a house without a blanket-wrapped figure shivering with the malaria which comes each year.

Much sickness is recognized for what it is, and modern methods of treatment are sought. There is no doctor in the village but, when they can, the Atzompeños go into Oaxaca, occasionally to a regular physician, more often to a woman who lives on the outskirts of the city and is less expensive. She has some medical knowledge and gives injections. A long illness cuts deeply into family resources, necessitating the sale of an animal or the pawning of land. Those without capital must try to raise the money from relatives and *compadres*. Many go without professional help because they cannot afford it, and others delay too long. The river is another factor which keeps people from receiving adequate medical attention. During the height of the rainy season last year, two deaths occurred which might have been prevented if the individuals could have been gotten to Oaxaca or a physician brought in.

In the early stages of disease, or for minor complaints, the villagers use home remedies. Herbs are taken internally for dysentery and stomach trouble, or made into poultices to be applied to aching limbs. Cinnamon tea is prescribed for colds, and salts for hangovers. A fever is treated with a necklace of limes. The heat is drawn off into the fruit, which withers and dies as the patient gets better. Hair from the tail of a coyote, bound tightly to the waist, will take away the pain from that region.

Along with knowledge of natural causation for such diseases as malaria, and some awareness that microbes (*los microbios*) may be a source of illness, are concepts that are found throughout rural Latin America. One of these is *aire*--air that hits an exposed part of the body and produces aches and pains. Sometimes it enters the body and one feels as though somebody were throwing stones around inside. Another is the notion of "cold" foods, especially certain fruits which cause harm, if they are taken in hot weather.<sup>13</sup> The dangers of cold and temperature contrast are extended to include bathing in cold water when one is overheated, or stepping from a warm atmosphere into a cool one. A menstruating woman should avoid bathing during, and for at least a week before, her period, and some believe a nursing mother ought to refrain from pottery, as the cold clay chills her breasts, and this is bad for the baby.

Some maladies are ascribed to emotional states. Loss of health may follow a disappointment in love, and children often fall sick from missing someone to whom they have become attached. Anger can cause illness and is made worse by eating cheese or drinking chocolate at that time. By far the most common psychosomatic ailment, however, is *susto* (fright). It can be brought on by many things--by seeing a person who has just been killed, by a blow, by bad news, by any kind of an accident or shock.



Several of my female informants feared that they might be "frightened" by the flash camera. The symptoms, too, are many--dizziness, chills or fever, pains, weakness. One feels sad for no reason, lazy and wanting to sleep all the time or nervous and not able to sleep at all. One then tries to remember where the fright occurred and returns to that place to be cured.

There are three professional *curanderos* in the village who can be called in to treat illnesses, or a member of the family may do the curing. However, men always treat women, and women treat men. Treatment consists of rubbing an egg over the head and body of the patient and blowing mezcal on the parts that are especially affected. Following this, the *curandero* draws a cross on the ground, digs a hole in the center, and buries the egg, along with whatever the patient has dreamed that the *susto* requires--cigarettes, sweets, meat, tiny tortillas. The curing that I witnessed was for a woman whose *susto* had asked for animal crackers, and, after burying a couple of them, the *curandero*, her husband, handed one to each of us who were watching with the words, "Eat this for the sake of the señora." As he covered the hole he said, "Set her free, Chaneca," the latter being another term for *susto*.

Treatments from a professional cost a peso each and they should be continued until the patient recovers. Sometimes there is no relief and the patient dies. Two brief case histories will illustrate the variations in peoples' experiences.

A young man went with his burro to the hills to gather wood. It was an enchanted place inhabited by evil things, and the burro fell down. He was "frightened" and shortly afterwards broke out in boils which did not heal. His family told him he should go to a *curandera* but he refused, saying he had no belief. He was taken to a doctor, which cost much money and more for medicines, but nothing helped. The family asked him what then was he going to do and finally he consented to a curing. He had three a day for eight days and at the end of that time the boils were gone.

A woman of about fifty-five, has been ailing for six years, ever since a sister-in-law of hers was killed by a cousin. She saw the murder take place. She was alone at the time and could do nothing, and for that reason she was very "frightened." She went to the *curandero* and, although somewhat alleviated, she is still not well. One day she is tranquil and able to work, the next she feels bad with dizziness in the head and pains in the shoulders. She has gone to the doctor in Oaxaca and tried other remedies at home without success, but she has stopped going to the *curandero* as he can do nothing for her.

It is evident that *susto* is held accountable for physical symptoms which do not respond to modern medicine, as well as for those our society would classify as psychological in origin. If the onset can be traced to a specific event, diagnosis is easier, but neither the cause nor the cure tend to be regarded as supernatural in nature. Formerly, *susto* was probably associated with soul loss. I ran across a possible reference to soul loss only once in Atzompa. A woman told me her nephew did not want to be photographed, as he would no longer enjoy good health if his picture were taken away to a foreign country. The belief that sickness is a castigation sent by God continues, and thirty or forty years ago a pilgrimage to a famous shrine might have been made. Today, the individual is more apt to offer a candle to his favorite saint in the village church, or promise to support the saint's fiesta for the coming year.

Witchcraft is viewed less as a cause of illness than of death. The witches, (*brujos*) come at night in the form of animals--dogs, pigs, burros, buzzards, to hit their victims and suck their blood. They prefer that of babies because it is sweeter, but they will also molest adults and even dogs. One feels a heaviness on the neck or cheek while sleeping, tries to move or call out, and finds one cannot. The next morning there is a purple spot where the *brujo* has sucked. For a grown person, this is usually not fatal, but it is blamed for well over half of the high infant mortality. It is always easy to tell when a witch has been

responsible. The death is sudden and the child all purple from the blows. Its hands are clenched, and it utters cries of "ai, ai," just before it dies. Some protection can be obtained by a bag of mustard seeds or pins tied around the neck. Metal, especially gold, is an excellent safeguard, and a dog wearing a collar of wire will not be attacked. Dung from a black burro, kept wrapped in a rag or burned outside the house, drives witches away, as it makes them cough.

Either men or women can become witches, although it is not known exactly how. Some believe they are born that way, others that they get their familiar (*tona*) in childhood.<sup>14</sup> What is certain, however, is that very few witches live in Atzompa. One old woman is suspected, and there may be others, but the majority come from the outside—from San Felipe, Cuilapam, and Oaxaca—communities with which the Atzompeños have many commercial transactions involving the pottery. People from these places arrive in the day time to buy and, when they enter a house, they may notice a baby which pleases them. Or they may become angry because the price of the pottery is too high and return at night to take their revenge.

Witching, in the form of love magic or disposing of an enemy, is not the same as being a witch, and is practiced within the village. Whether or not images are made, I do not know, but the use of photographs in this connection suggests that they are, or were. To punish or persuade a woman who has spurned him, a man can put hot chiles or spines on her picture until she sickens and relents. Or he buries it and she dies. The same technique may be employed to rid oneself of a rival. Few Atzompeños would, by themselves, attempt to bewitch someone, but would consult one of the several persons in the village who are versed in such matters. In extreme cases and, if they have the money, they can go to Oaxaca where there are experts who charge heavily for their services.

Witchcraft is not a particularly touchy subject. Like almost everything else, it can be a topic for jokes, and people laughingly refer to their friends and near relations as witches. At the same time, it is not brought up on first acquaintance and constitutes a real danger against which preventive measures must be taken. Its function, like that of *susto*, is to explain the otherwise inexplicable and narrow the gap between unexpected personal misfortune and the individual's limited capacity to predict and cope with it. An added dimension may be its use as a scapegoating device against outsiders looked upon as economic exploiters.

## Death and Burial

Death is accepted philosophically. In the words of an older woman, "Thus it is; we are here one day and the next who knows." A corpse is not considered contaminating, although sick people do well to avoid contact. The ghosts of the departed occasionally appear and while they are not exactly harmful, it is certainly a frightening experience to see one.

At death, the body is laid out with flowers and candles; a baby is put on the family altar. The wake (*vela*), starts immediately, relatives and *compadres* gathering at the house to spend the night in praying. They bring contributions of food and money to help with the expenses. The following morning the musicians arrive and, after a meal has been served, the coffin is carried to the church. The priest is hardly ever present, the short service being conducted by a *cantor*. The cemetery lies about a half a mile outside of the village, and as the procession passes through on its way there, women slip out of their gates to join it. A burial is a community affair, and anyone may attend. At every corner the mourners stop to pray and sing and some have to be supported, for the mezcal has been flowing freely. At the cemetery the coffin is usually opened and dirt is sprinkled inside. Whereas at the wake people have been fairly cheerful, this is an occasion for grief, the close relatives sobbing and bending to kiss the corpse. The coffin is closed, and the women throw in handfuls of dirt as it is lowered into the grave.



## 7. Death



The Wake



The Funeral



Processions from church and to graveyard



Raising of the Cross



Sand Painting of Cross

Each night following the funeral a *rezador* comes to the house to pray, and on the ninth evening people again assemble for the Raising of the Cross. Actually this is a sandpainting, made by one of the *rezadores* of colored earth, powdered charcoal, and lime, surrounded by candles.<sup>15</sup> Praying continues through the night while the guests eat, drink, talk among themselves, or try to catch a little sleep. At dawn the cross is dismantled and the ingredients taken in pottery bowls to the cemetery where they are buried in the grave.

For an *angelito* there may be a big fiesta and fireworks. The baby's funeral I saw was not so elaborate, since the father was "not known"—that is, he did not recognize the child as his own. As often happens in such cases, it took place at night and although rockets were shot off, there were only five musicians and a few women to follow the little white box as it came from the church.

#### ATZOMPA: AN OVERVIEW

In its broad outlines, Atzompa is typical of many villages in central and southern Mexico. Its major institutions—economic, social and religious—are less a mingling of Spanish and Indian customs than a persistence of sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish patterns, with traces of Indian retentions. Its way of life does not appear to be significantly different from that of the Zapotec speaking communities located near the city of Oaxaca.<sup>16</sup> As compared to Coyotepec, which is defined as Zapotec, Atzompa has been called *meztizo*<sup>17</sup>, and so it is, if language is taken to be the only relevant criterion. The important distinctions are not among the villages of the central valley, but between them and those of the mountain regions where both Zapotecs and Mixtecs live in relative isolation, with little or no participation in the national culture. It is these communities which may more legitimately be considered "Indian," whereas those of the valley can be characterized as "folk" in Foster's sense of the term—a segment or "half society," that is by its very nature dependent on a pre-industrialized urban center. The culture of folk societies is the result of long term, continuous contact with such centers, and their salient features are those of the sophisticated metropolitan societies of several centuries earlier.<sup>18</sup>

The dependence of Atzompa on Oaxaca city has been documented for almost every facet of village life, and the urban center continues to be the chief source for the dissemination of new ideas. Oaxaca, however, is far from being a modern industrialized city. Particularly on the outskirts, and in and around the market, people live in a manner that is similar to that of the rural populations, so that, although Atzompeños come into the city regularly, their contacts are with individuals who are much like themselves: provincial, poor, and often illiterate. They have little to do with the educated or professional classes, who tend to define them as Indians and look down on them as persons of lower social and economic status.<sup>19</sup> Due to the opening of the Pan-American highway, the influx of tourists within the last few years, and the development of mining in various parts of the state, the capital is growing and is starting to move in the direction of industrialization and modernization. As these changes take hold and begin to influence the mass of the urban population, they will undoubtedly diffuse into the rural areas, but at the moment the part of Oaxaca city that impinges directly on the villages is not moving very rapidly.

A second potential source of change for Atzompa is the *bracero* system. So far, it has had little effect, beyond providing some individuals with extra capital to improve their position within the matrix of village culture. None of the men who have been to the States speak or understand English, and in spite of the great curiosity that exists about life and customs "up there," little knowledge about them has been brought back. Even the families of *braceros* are confused about geography, usually assume that Texas is a separate country, and are continually surprised to find that North Americans behave in much the same manner as they do. The reason why experience in a foreign land has had so little impact may be sought in the conditions of the contract labor system. The men go to parts of the United States where there are

already large concentrations of Mexicans and other Spanish-speaking peoples. They live and work among their own countrymen, indeed often with neighbors from their own villages. Physically and socially they are isolated from the mainstream of North American culture, and, in their rare contacts with it, they frequently meet with discrimination. They are employed in agricultural tasks that involve hand methods, picking fruit or cotton, and when they do see modern technology used in farming, it is on so vast a scale that it scarcely seems applicable to their own small plots back home.<sup>20</sup> If more Atzompeños go as *braceros* and remain for longer periods, they may absorb more of North American ways and become a force for change, although at first this will take the form of new needs and wants which will be difficult to satisfy within the restricted village economy.

At the present time Atzompa does not appear to be undergoing any basic alterations in its traditional patterns. The loss of the native language must have taken place well over fifty years ago and possibly much earlier, as none of the older people speak it or remember whether it was Zapotec, Mixtec, or Nahuatl. The separation of the political from the religious hierarchy, if it is beginning to occur, can be expected to result in important modifications: the substitution of permanent, remunerative governments posts for the rotating, gratuitous service now exacted, and the eventual simplification or disappearance of the fiesta system because of the financial burdens it imposes,<sup>21</sup> but these changes are still in the future. Changes taking place today are more minor in character: the loss of such customs as the Dance of the Conquest, the innovations in dress, the increase in the number of individuals who attend school. Education does not have the influence that it might, because schooling of more than a few years takes people out of the village, and they rarely return.

Some features of life in Atzompa are certainly disruptive--the instability of marriage, the excessive drinking, the scandalmongering and quarreling, which sometimes end in physical violence. Yet, I do not consider these to be symptoms of social disorganization nor a breakdown of the folk patterns of the society. Rather, they are endemic to much of Latin American culture,<sup>22</sup> and in some degree, the inevitable concomitants of life in a small rural community. Moreover, there are strong compensating factors which hold the village together: *compadrazgo*, which fosters respect and intimacy between unrelated families, and provides a system of mutual aid; fiestas which, along with the emphasis on good manners and correct behavior, compel cooperation, and at least an outward show of politeness on the part of individuals who may dislike each other intensely; total acquaintanceship--the fact that everyone knows everyone else, usually by a nickname.<sup>23</sup> Even gossip functions to preserve cohesiveness, for while it often foments ill will, it also serves as a very efficient channel of communication.

That Atzompa regards itself as an entity is a further contribution to social solidarity. The villagers, although they may fight among themselves, are by their own definition "Atzompeños," quite distinct from the inhabitants of other villages who, at best, have customs that are queer and unnatural, and at worst may be witches or robbers. Toward the people of the mountain regions, the Atzompeños are somewhat contemptuous, referring to them as "the ill-dressed ones" who speak an ugly and unintelligible language (Mixtec). By contrast, the city dwellers are respected and looked up to as people who occupy a slightly higher social position. Within the village, distinctions are made between richer and poorer, and between "natives," those born in Atzompa, and the individuals who have moved in from the *ranchos* and other nearby communities. The differences are not great enough, however, to have led to the development of clear-cut classes, and there seems to be no stratification along ethnic lines. I never heard the terms *indio* or *natural* (Indian), and there are no *gente de razon*, a phrase often used in Latin America to distinguish mestizos from persons defined as Indian.

Atzompa, then, may be considered a relatively stable and homogeneous community. It is by no means isolated from outside influences, but, because the region of which it is a part is one of the less progressive areas of Mexico, profound changes do not appear to be imminent. In this respect, it is representative of other villages in the Oaxaca valley, and, from a broader point of view, of rural

communities in many parts of the country. How pottery making, as one of the basic institutions of the society, is carried out in this rather typical village forms the subject of the remainder of this study. The first of the various aspects of the craft to be considered is techniques, but preceding this, a brief description of the pottery, its function, and what little is known of its history is presented in the following chapter.

## Notes to Chapter 2

1. Parsons, 1936, p. 61; Foster, 1955, p. 23.
2. Interview with Sr. Iturribarría in Oaxaca in September, 1955.
3. Santa Catarina has 81 inhabitants, La Soledad 28, and Yahuiche 99. Mexican census for 1950, Vol. 4, Oaxaca.
4. This percentage, and those which follow, is derived from the sample of 69 families and can be considered only roughly representative of the total population.
5. This form of sharecropping, known as *á medias*, is common throughout Mexico.
6. At the present time (1957) the exchange rate is twelve and a half pesos to the dollar, so that the peso is worth eight cents in American money.
7. In the years 1942-1944, the period when the largest number of braceros went to the States, six per cent came from Oaxaca state. Whetten, p. 269.
8. Parsons was struck by this trait in Mitla and attributed it to the fact that many of the townspeople are traders, but this would not account for it in Atzompa. Parsons, 1936, p. 13.
9. Mexican census for 1950, Vol. 4, Oaxaca.
10. On any one day a large number of both boys and girls are absent, their parents keeping them at home to help around the house or in the fields.
11. Pedro Carrasco points out that when *mayordomos* cease to be linked to the government hierarchy, their numbers are reduced, and the fiesta cult is simplified. Carrasco, 1951, p. 107.
12. Parsons found this custom in all Zapotec regions she visited but also in the Mixtec-speaking village of Cuilapam. Parsons, 1936, p. 76.
13. The concept of "cold" and "hot" foods which are dangerous to the health, if taken at certain times, is common in all of Latin America. In Atzompa, I heard of no reference to hot foods, only to cold.
14. In Prehispanic times everyone had a *tona* or guardian spirit acquired at birth. The belief still survives in places like Chiapas but not, I think, in the Valley of Oaxaca. Parsons, too, found it in Mitla only as an explanation for witches. Parsons, 1936, p. 80.
15. Parsons reports a similar cross at Cuilapam, a Mixtec village, but none at Zapotec-speaking Mitla. Parsons, 1936, p. 142.

16. See Pedro Yescas Peralta, 1954, for a brief description of Teotitlan de Valle.
17. Foster, 1955, p. 23.
18. Foster, 1953, pp. 163-164. It should be pointed out that Foster would include the mountain regions of Oaxaca state as examples of folk societies, more remote than the valleys from the influence of the cities, but still a part of the national culture in a way that tribal peoples in some parts of Latin America, untouched by contact with the outside, are not.
19. Class barriers, while not as high as in other parts of Mexico, are still operative. See pp. 95-96 in *Heritage of Conquest* by Sol Tax and others, 1952, for a description of ethnic relations in the Oaxaca area.
20. Of 500 *braceros* from various parts of Mexico who were studied after their return from the States, few had learned new skills and only 2.33 per cent had acquired any command of the English language. Martínez, 1943, p. 195.
21. These changes have been found to be a consequence of such a separation in other rural Oaxaca communities. Carrasco, 1951 pp. 105-107.
22. Gillin attributes some of these traits to the Latin American value placed on individualism. Gillin, 1955, pp. 491-493.
23. Although the practice of the Atzompeños of identifying each other by nicknames like "Frog," "Little Horses," and "Frying Pan" may create some confusion for the visiting ethnographer, it is evidence of the extent to which individuals and their idiosyncracies are familiar to all members of the community.

## CHAPTER III

### THE POTTERY

#### FORM AND FUNCTION

The pottery of Atzompa is diverse in form and size, ranging from huge water jars with a capacity of up to thirty gallons to miniature figurines of less than an inch in height. It can be classified in several different ways—by shape, color, and decoration, by function, or by according to whether it is *corriente*, common pottery for daily use, or *fino* for sale to the city people and tourists. To a considerable extent, the types derived from these criteria are overlapping, although all of them are recognized and used by the potters in referring to their work.

The village is best known for its *loza verde*, a green glazed ware that is produced in great quantities. Most of it is more properly termed *medio verde*, half green, since only the inside of the vessels is glazed, and the outside is left bisque (unglazed), with a color that shades from light yellow to red, depending on the nature of the clay. This is the domestic pottery of the region, durable, and suitable for cooking, as it withstands exposure to the hottest flame. It is standard equipment in virtually every kitchen in the valley and has a wide distribution throughout the state of Oaxaca. When a pot is glazed on the outside as well, it becomes *todo verde*, and is classed as ornamental or fine pottery (*loza fina*). More expensive than the *medio verde*, *todo verde* is often made in shapes that are designed to appeal to the tourist trade, and is bought by the villagers only for special occasions.

Both utilitarian and decorative objects are turned out in a red, unglazed finish. Called *loza colorada*, this pottery is painted and burnished until a brilliant red color has been attained. It is produced on a more limited scale than the green ware, only five or six families specializing in it at the present time.

The basic shapes of the domestic pottery are fairly simple and few of them are unique to Atzompa. The *comal*, a shallow griddle for tortillas; the *olla*, a globular shaped jar with a wide mouth and a rounded bottom, and the *cazuela*, a casserole, are found in all parts of Mexico. Less common are the *apaxtle*, which resembles a dishpan, and the Atzompa *jarro*, a jug with a deep neck or collar, no spout, and a high flaring handle. Slight variations in structural features are sufficient to warrant different names. *Ollas* with flattened sides are *barrilitos*; *cajetes* are shaped like *comales* with the addition of a low rim; *macetas* (flowerpots) are similar to *apaxtles* but taller and narrower. The *caso* is another modification of the *apaxtle*; a tub-like vessel with flaring sides and a rounded bottom. It is a *cerrero* when it has handles and a *pelón* (baldpate) when it does not. A shallow *cazuela* becomes a *sartén* or *charola*, a *jarro* with a spout and a foot is a *pichelito*, and a *jarro* with a handle over the top, instead of on the side, is an *olla de aza*.

The size and finish of a pot are determined principally by the use to which it will be put. *Comales* are normally about three feet in diameter to accommodate four or five of the large tortillas, and they should be thin enough to allow the heat to penetrate quickly. They are not glazed nor is the surface treated in any way. Although, with care, *comales* will last for six months, they are very brittle and most families have to replace them every month or so. *Ollas* are glazed on the inside, to make them water tight, and occasionally the exterior is slipped and polished red. Three sizes are made—*grandes*, *medianos*, and *chiquitos*. The large ones serve for storing water, the smaller for holding other liquids, and for cooking. *Apaxtles*, too, vary in dimensions, from small to very large ones, more than three feet wide, used for washing and bathing. They are *medio verde* or *colorado*, but the latter make poor cooking pots because, without glaze, they absorb too much grease.



Figure 1. DOMESTIC POTTERY

SHAPES	TYPES OF FINISH
COMAL	none
CAJETE	<i>medio verde</i>
OLLA	<i>medio verde</i> or <i>colorado</i>
BARRILITO	<i>medio verde</i> or <i>colorado</i>
APAXTLE	<i>medio verde</i> or <i>colorado</i>

SHAPES

TYPES OF FINISH

MACETA



*medio verde,  
colorado or  
todo verde*

CAZUELA



*medio verde  
todo verde*

JARRO



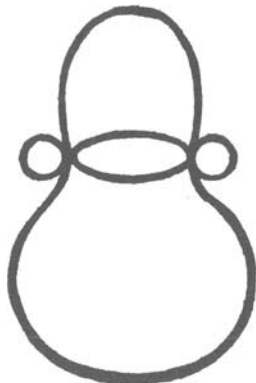
*medio verde  
todo verde*

PICHELITO



*todo verde*

OLLA DE AZA



*medio verde  
todo verde*

## 8. Domestic Pottery



*Apaxtle--unfired*



*Olla--medio verde*



*Large jarro--medio verde*



*Small jarro--todo verde*



*Cazuela--medio verde*

Most *cazuelas* are *medio verde*, and there is not much variation in size, nine inches across being the average. Sometimes they have a scalloped edge which gives a pleasing decorative effect; when *todo verde*, they are more elaborate, with designs incised in the bottom. This type is seldom used by the villagers. *Jarros* of any kind tend to be decorated, and the *medio verde* are partially glazed on the outside as well as the interior. Large ones are used during fiestas for cooking and serving chocolate and other drinks. A good *jarro* should be a *cascarita*--as thin as an egg shell, so that its contents will boil quickly.

The specialized or ornamental ware is made in smaller quantities than the domestic pottery, and in a greater diversity of shapes: *floreros* and *jardineros*, flower vases and flower pots; *batidores*, big bowls for beating chocolate; *cafeteras* and *azucareros*, coffee pots and sugar bowls; *licoreras*, decanters with a tray and six little glasses; *braseros*, three-legged incense burners. All are turned out in a bright green glaze. Several families, among them the Aguilar, are famous for their *juguetes*, toys, and every form found in the regular sized pottery is duplicated in these miniature pieces. Others specialize in animals--lions, elephants, camels, cats, pigs, frogs. Some animals are "purely for adornment," others are fashioned into toothpick holders, banks, or ashtrays. One potter devised the notion of having the animals stand upright and play on musical instruments. Pottery of this kind is generally glazed green, but the Torres brothers work large horses and tigers, to which they give the *colorado* finish. One of the women of their family makes red water jugs in the shape of ducks, and a double-spouted variety called a *perrito*, a little dog. Small whistles in the form of birds and beasts are the specialty of another family. Most of these items are produced for the tourist trade, although *floreros* and *braseros* are used in the Atzompa church and are frequently purchased by the people of other villages for the altars of their churches. Ornamental ware that is damaged and unfit for the city market is kept by the potters for their own use or sold to other villagers at a reduced price. Cracked *jardineros* replace the usual tin cans as flower pots, and broken *juguetes* are given to the children to play with.

If Atzompa can be said to have a ceremonial pottery, it is the *chías*, animals with glazed heads and bisque, striated bodies. At Easter these figurines are filled with water, and *chías*, the seeds which give them their name, are rubbed on the outside. After a few days, the seeds sprout, and within a week the animal is covered with a fuzzy green coat of grass. Each family altar is adorned with three or four of these unique pottery objects during Holy Week, and they are widely used in other villages throughout the valley for the same purpose. Their exact religious significance has been lost and today *chías* are simply *costumbre*, custom. That they were originally a fertility symbol is suggested by another custom. At the time cornfields are seeded, *milpas*, "fields" represented by flower pots, are planted and set along with the *chías* on the altar "to help the corn grow."<sup>1</sup>

Human figures are rarely attempted by the potters. When the Torres brothers were commissioned by the *presidente* to make a two-foot statue of a man to be put up at the bus stop, they modeled several but were unable to achieve one that did not break in the firing. Teodora Blanco, the potter who makes the musical animals, does small figures of men and women, which she uses to ornament ashtrays. Both she and another potter press out replicas of idols from plaster molds, which they buy in Oaxaca. According to Teodora, however, idols do not sell well, since they are quite obviously not authentic.

Except for touches of white slip on the red animals, pottery is not painted, the decorations being either stamped, incised, or modeled. Stamping is confined to *jarros*; it is done with small clay pellets impressed on the vessel while it is still damp. The motifs are simple--circles, crescents, rosettes, and leaves. More complicated floral patterns are incised on *jarros* and *cazuelas* with a nail or some other sharp instrument. Frequently the designs are combined with names because, as the potters point out, people are more likely to buy a pot if they find their name on it. *Macetas* too are sometimes incised with crosses, triangles, or simply wavy lines. Much of the effect of stamping and incising is lost on the finished piece, as the designs are not cut deeply enough to prevent them from being filled in by the heavy coating of glaze.

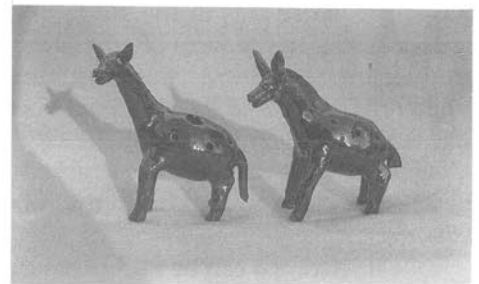
## 9. Specialties - Animal Forms



*Chía*



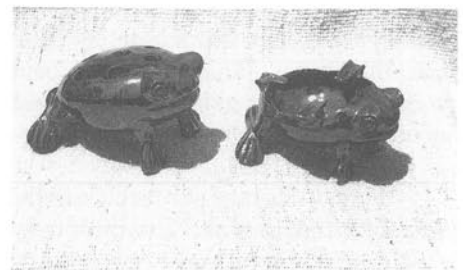
Horses--colorado finish



Toothpick holders



Musical Animals



Frogs: flower holder  
and ashtray



Whistles

10. Specialties - Loza Fina



*Sartén* with incised design



*Jarro aplastado*



*Juguetes*--coffee pot  
and sugar bowl



--vases



--decanter on a  
tray (2" high)



*Jardineros bordados*



Bird jug by Teodora



A third type of decoration is known as *bordado*; it consists of a profusion of flowers, grapes, leaves, and tendrils that are modeled in high relief and cover the body of the vessel. Until recently, only the Aguilars ornamented their work in this way, applying it to their *juguetes* and to the larger pottery which they produce—*floreros*, *jardineros*, and *licoreras*, and the results are almost rococo in their elaborateness. Forty years ago, another variety of *bordado* was done by a man who ornamented *jarros* with Aztec idols in low relief. When he died, this sort of decoration was discontinued, although it is now beginning to be revived by his grandsons. Yet another style of *bordado* is made by Teodora Blanco who takes large *jarros* and converts them into birds by the addition of heads, wings, and tails.

Stylistically Atzompa's pottery runs the gamut from the *ollas* and other utilitarian objects, which derive their aesthetic values from simple proportions and strong, massive shapes, to the *loza bordada* with its ornate and intricate decoration. In the latter, the decorative elements sometimes seem to bear little or no relationship to the structure of the vessel, which gets lost under a mass of detail. Intermediate between these two extremes of simplicity and elaboration are the *jarros* and *cazuelas finas*. Here surfaces are embellished, but more subtly, and in such a way as to enhance rather than obscure the basic form of the object. The animals are the nearest approach to representative art. Lively and naturalistic, they resemble the utilitarian ware in their lack of refinement and the economy with which they achieve their effect. Naturalism is also the keynote of both the incised and modeled designs, which neither distort nor modify the elements of which they are composed. When the potters attempt representation, they seem to do so in as realistic a manner as their techniques permit. As a style characteristic, color plays a minor role. Color contrasts are restricted to the *medio verde* pots with their green interior and red or yellow, or partially glazed, outside. Color is not an element in ornamental pottery since this ware is completely glazed.

#### DISTRIBUTION AND HISTORY

Atzompa ranks next to Oaxaca city as the most important pottery producing center of the state. No other rural community equals the variety and quantity of its output. To the south, in the Isthmus, several towns turn out utilitarian articles—bowls, water jugs, and *cazuelas*. In Juchitan they are given a black finish by a technique learned in Coyotepec some years ago by a Juchiteco potter.<sup>2</sup> In Tehuantepec and Ixtaltepec similar items, with somewhat different shapes, are made and either left bisque or glazed green by a method introduced from Atzompa.<sup>3</sup> Decorative ceramics include small painted figurines, modeled for the children at New Years. It is Atzompa *juguetes*, however, that are tossed out to the crowd during the big summer fiestas in Isthmus towns.

In the valley of Oaxaca, along with the factory made pottery of the city, there is the ware of Coyotepec and that of Ocotlan de Morelos. In Ocotlan about twenty potters in one of the barrios make unglazed cups and plates as well as tripod braziers surmounted by birds. Coyotepec produces in greater variety, with its guitar-playing sirens, bells, whistles, and other toys, but its only utilitarian objects are *cántaros* of different sizes, and *cajetes*. Atzompeños are familiar with the polished black of Coyotepec since formerly they used the *cántaros* to transport their water. These, however, are fast being made obsolete by gasoline tins. Today, although the villagers occasionally buy one of the smaller Coyotepec pieces as a curiosity or a toy for the children, they can see little use for the black pottery, which they compare unfavorably with their own. One cannot cook in it, as it does not stand the fire; it breaks easily and is good for nothing but holding water.

Oaxaca city, in spite of the quantity of its production, supplements rather than competes with the pottery of Atzompa. The urban population needs the *comales*, *apaxtles*, and *ollas* made in the village, while the villagers use, as "tableware", the shallow bowls and plates thrown on wheels in the city factories. Atzompa's *loza fina* also holds its own with the many items turned out in Oaxaca for the tourist trade.

These are apt to be gaudier and look more factory-made. They are, therefore, often passed over by prospective buyers in favor of a pot that appears to be a more authentic example of native folk art.

In the Mixtec and Zapotec mountain villages to the northwest some domestic pottery is made, but not enough to exclude the use of Atzompa ware in that region.<sup>4</sup> On the northern border of the state there is competition with the practical brown cooking pots of Puebla. This, too, is known in the village, where it is referred to as "*poblano*," but it is not highly regarded. Atzompeños say that it does not take the fire as it should and breaks after having been used two or three times, whereas a good Atzompa pot will last a year.

The widespread distribution of Atzompa pottery and its importance in the daily life of the region implies that the village has been a center of production for some time. Just how long, however, is a matter of conjecture, since there is almost no historical material to bring to bear on the problem.<sup>5</sup> Nor are there sufficient data to trace the origin of specific forms. The villagers are apt to be poor informants on events that have occurred outside the span of their own lifetimes, and, when questioned on this topic, say simply that the *loza* has been made for as long as their fathers' fathers' fathers could remember; therefore, as far as they are concerned, forever. I received the same answer when I inquired about particular types of pottery such as the *chías* and the water jugs.

Archeological work in the valley of Oaxaca has established the fact that much of the pottery produced today has Prehispanic prototypes. Polished redware, as well as black, has been found at Monte Albán, while *apaxtles*, *ollas*, whistles, and *juguetes* have been unearthed from Zapotec tombs not far from Atzompa.<sup>6</sup> Whistles in the shape of animals were common in many ancient Mexican cultures, and the Zapotecs modeled small sets of dancers and musicians.<sup>7</sup> The Oaxaca museum has no examples of pottery which might be early Atzompa, but on the basis of the archeological evidence, the director, Sr. Gamio, is of the opinion that the *loza colorada* and many of the forms of the domestic pottery date back to Prehispanic times. The technique of glazing is a later development, introduced from Spain. The *chías* also appear to be ancient, perhaps Prehispanic, although they have been made in quantity only in recent years.

Along with forms they have probably been making for centuries, the Atzompeños are quick to adopt new ones. The coffee pots, decanters, ashtrays, and other specialties for the city market have probably been derived from Oaxaca within the last fifty years. *Bordado* designs have been made for little more than a decade, having been started by one of the Aguilar. Very tiny *juguetes* are the recent invention of another family who took the miniature ware and made it even smaller. Loss, as well as innovation, occurs when certain kinds of pottery are discontinued. Tía Lina remembers a family who used to make *barrilitos* as high as a person, but when the family died out, their craft died with them. The same fate seems to threaten the large *apaxtles* which are made chiefly by the older women, the younger potters tending to avoid them.

In order to gain some idea of the changes which have taken place since the beginning of the century, I asked my five oldest informants, women of sixty to seventy, what the pottery was like when they were young. Two of the women told me that the old people of their day made better pottery than that produced at the present time. It was stronger and heavier. The handles were well attached and did not come off in the fire as they do now. The three others held an opposite view, claiming that the ancient pottery was ugly--badly made and very common. The modern pottery, they felt, is prettier and there are many more different shapes. These answers, although not helpful in tracing specific changes, do suggest that there has been a development in the direction of lighter, thinner vessels with more decoration--in other words, a trend away from the utilitarian towards the ornamental. Further, they serve to confirm the supposition that there has been a proliferation of forms, and that many of the specialties produced today are of fairly recent origin.

### Notes to Chapter 3

1. Covarrubias reports a *chía* type of water jar from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Covarrubias, 1946, p. 296.
2. Covarrubias, 1946, p. 295.
3. Foster, 1955, p. 25.
4. De la Fuente mentions Atzompa *apaxtles* among the household articles of Yalalag, a Zapotec mountain community. De la Fuente, 1949, pp. 49-51.
5. The Van de Veldes were faced with a similar problem in their study of Coyotepec. The village is mentioned in several of the chronicles of the sixteenth century, but there is no reference to pottery. Van de Velde, 1939, p. 16.
6. Personal communication from Sr. Manuel Gamio.
7. Martí, 1955, pp. 63-78 and p. 183.

## CHAPTER IV

### POTTERY MAKING AS A CRAFT

#### THE POTTERS AND THEIR SPECIALTIES

Pottery making is the craft or *oficio* of the overwhelming majority of families in Atzompa. Out of 104 households surveyed, representing a little better than one-fourth of the total population, only 12 do not have at least one member who is a potter. Of these, six have never manufactured pottery and are specialists in other trades—butchers, millers, and masons, while the others used to make it, but have given it up.

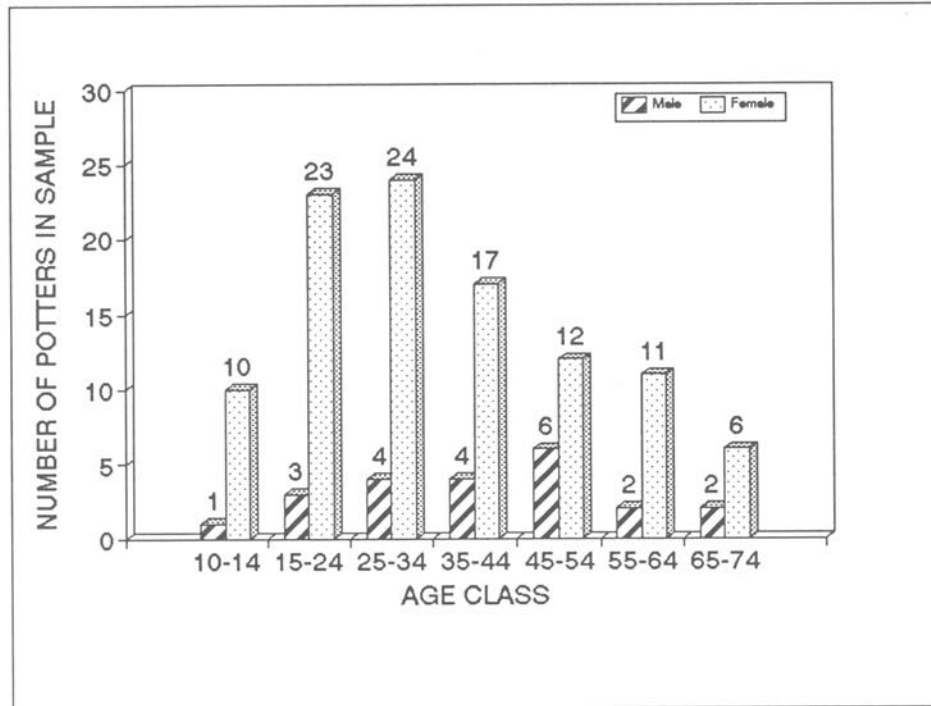
Approximately two-thirds of the pottery producing families are also farmers. In some families, farming is a full-time occupation for the men since they own oxen and work their own lands. For those who are landless, it is a secondary activity carried out on a more limited scale. The men work on shares with rented teams of oxen, or hire themselves out as day laborers to the more prosperous farmers. Several pottery families have small stores and in others one or more of the men are musicians, augmenting their incomes by playing in one of the village bands.

That pottery, rather than farming, is the base of subsistence in Atzompa is revealed by the fact that in a sample of 69 families, 3 per cent are farmers who do not practice the craft, whereas 30 per cent do no farming and support themselves solely with pottery.<sup>1</sup> Given sufficient lands, farming by itself provides a better living than pottery. Although the range in the economic status of the potters approximates that of the population as a whole, they are, taken as a group, less financially secure than non-potters. The poorest, but not the richest, individuals in the community are found among those whose only occupation is pottery. Both potters and non-potters are eager to go to the States as *braceros*, but the proportion who have gone is somewhat higher among the latter, which may in part account for their better standard of living.

Pottery is a home industry that requires the participation of the men. Regardless of whether or not they have some other occupation, men have specific tasks to perform. It is their job to obtain the clay, to prepare it, to help with the polishing and glazing, and to do the firing. In some households men also make the pots, but this is usually done by the women. Figure 2, on the following page, gives the distribution by age and sex of 124 potters in 59 families.<sup>2</sup> Not only do the women far outnumber the men, they start at an earlier age. Further, of the 21 male potters, half do not work at pottery steadily enough to be considered full-time craftsmen.

The possibility that pottery was once a male occupation was suggested to me by Tía Lina, who said that her father, himself a master potter, maintained that it was properly the work of the men, and he made his sons learn. In Coyotepec the craft appears to have shifted from the hands of the men to the women within the last two decades. The Van de Veldes, who visited the village in the 1930's, encountered few expert potters who were women,<sup>3</sup> while twenty years later Foster found that they were invariably women.<sup>4</sup> There is no information as to why such a change should have occurred, although it might have been the result of the breakup of the *haciendas* and the redistribution of land in the form of *ejidos*. This began in Mexico about 1920, and provided new opportunities for farming to men in craft producing villages. If, however, there has been a similar change in Atzompa, it should show up in the age distribution of the male potters; the proportion of older men should be greater than that of the younger ones. But this is not the case, none of the older men mentioned that they had made pottery in their youth and had given it up, whereas almost all of the older women have worked as potters since childhood.

Figure 2: Age and Sex Distribution of 124 Potters in a Sample of 59 Families



Certainly, at the present time, pottery is regarded by the villagers of both sexes as the occupation of women. I was told repeatedly that, here in Atzompa, the men do not work at it, and the fact that some do tends to be minimized or ignored even by the members of their own families. It seems likely, therefore, that pottery has been a woman's craft for at least several generations, or perhaps always, and that the few men who take it up are the exception rather than the rule. Why certain men should do so when custom seems to be against it is a problem that will be touched on in a later section. The reasons do not seem to be purely economic, nor a matter of leisure time. Although a third of the male potters have no other occupation, the rest are farmers, and five of these have their own lands and oxen. Half of the non-farming families have no occupation other than pottery, and, in half of these, the adult men help their wives, but have never learned the craft.

Because of the great variety of pottery produced in Atzompa, no one potter is proficient in all of the different kinds. Certain kinds of ware, either because of shape, size, or finish, are recognized as constituting distinct crafts (*oficios*), which require special skills. Over half of the pottery producing families in the village limit themselves to the manufacture of one of six basic types of articles—*apaxtles*, *ollas*, *jarros*, *cazuelas*, *comales*, or specialties (animals, *juguetes*, or other items for the tourist trade).<sup>5</sup> In the remaining households, more than one of these articles is produced. This diversity is due either to the fact that individual members make different things, or that some women continue to make the sort of pottery they learned as children, as well as taking up that of their mothers-in-law. These women have two *oficios*.



Individual specialization and combinations of *oficios* in my sample of 124 potters from 59 families can be summarized as follows:

TABLE IV-1

Individual Specialization in Six Basic Types of Pottery

	<i>Apaxtle</i>	<i>Olla</i>	<i>Jarro</i>	<i>Cazuela</i>	<i>Comal</i>	Specialty
<i>Apaxtle</i>	15	5	1	2	0	0
<i>Olla</i>		22	10	1	1	1
<i>Jarro</i>			13	1	2	1
<i>Cazuela</i>				15	1	2
<i>Comal</i>					1	0
Specialty						25

Ninety-one people in the sample make only one type of ware, and the figures along the bottom diagonal of the table indicate these potters; 15 make only *apaxtles*, 22 make only *ollas*, 13 only *jarros*, 15 only *cazuelas*, one only *comales*, and 25 make only specialties.<sup>6</sup> *Apaxtle* and *olla* makers could be further differentiated according to the size in which they work. Big *ollas* in particular are considered a separate craft, and the four people in the sample who specialize in them never make anything else.

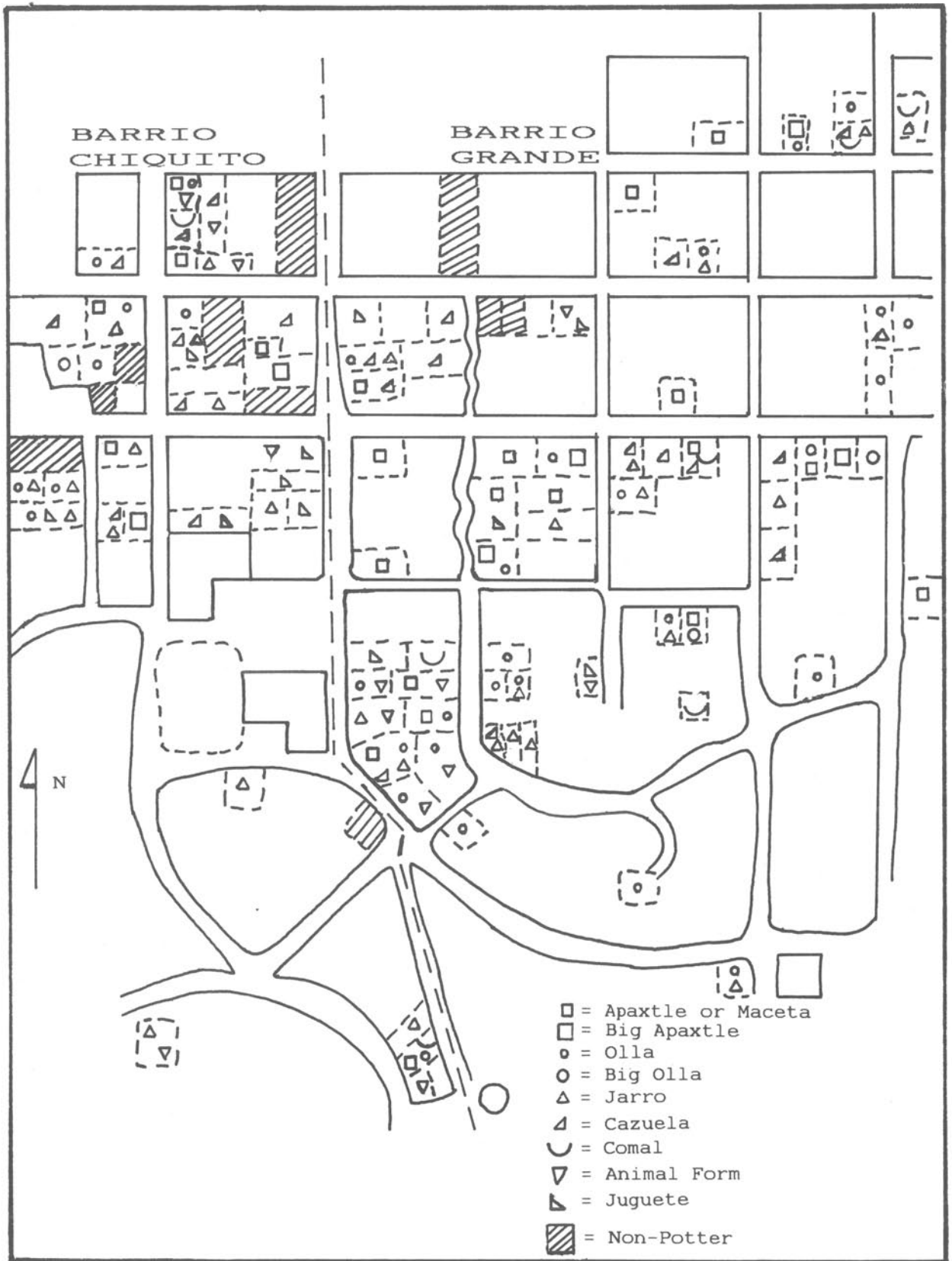
The addition of all of the figures in the table not lying on the bottom diagonal gives the number of potters who produce more than one type of article, and so have two *oficios*. There are 33 of these, all of them women. To a certain extent, which two *oficios* are combined is simply a matter of chance; i.e. a girl from an *olla* making family happens to marry into one which specializes in *cazuelas*. Yet the majority of women do not have two *oficios*, and among those that do, some *oficios* are more often combined than are others:

<i>Ollas</i> and <i>apaxtles</i>	5
<i>Ollas</i> and <i>jarros</i>	10
<i>Jarros</i> and <i>specialties</i>	6

The greater frequency of these combinations can be at least partially explained in terms of the function of the objects and the processes involved in making them. *Ollas* and *apaxtles* fall into the class of strictly utilitarian ware, and most of the individuals who work one or both of them are the *corriente* potters who have little to do with the ornamental *loza*. *Jarros*, although also domestic pottery, become luxury items when they are completely glazed and decorated, and are complex to produce in that they require several steps. The potters who make them, therefore, are more apt to be oriented toward the manufacture of other things for the tourist market, and to have the skill and patience necessary for the still more complicated specialties.

The association between the *ollas* and the *jarros* can be accounted for on the basis of the similarity of their shapes and the methods of making them. Both start from the same rounded form, and a *corriente jarro* is essentially a small *olla* to which a high collar and a handle have been added. For the same reason: the resemblance of the shapes, the items which are produced in small quantities are the province of particular potters. *Macetas* are generally turned out by the *apaxtle*-makers, as are the *casos* (round bottomed *apaxtles*). *Barrilitos* are made by the *olleras*, and the *cajetes*, which in shape are midway between an *olla* and a *comal*, are always made by people who make one or the other of those objects. Along with shape, and in the case of *ollas* and *cazuelas*, size, the type of finish can be a criterion for classifying *oficios*.

Map 2: Geographical Distribution of Nine Types of Pottery in 92 Families



Many potters make a distinction between the red polished and the green glazed ware, while a few regard the difference between half glazed and fully glazed as important. Cross-cutting all other distinctions is that between the *corriente* potters and those who produce the *loza fina*. The latter are roughly analogous to those who make the specialties, although some potters who make *cazuelas* or *jarros* ornament them with designs, which puts these items in the class of fine pottery.

Almost all potters know how to make a wider range of forms than the one or two which they reproduce on a large scale for marketing. Yet most are reluctant to attempt types of pottery which they consider to be outside of their *oficio*, and prefer to buy what they need for their own use, rather than make it. In some cases this extreme specialization can be attributed to not having the proper equipment, as for the *comales*, or the skill, as for the big *ollas*. In others, however, it is simply due to the attitude of the potters, especially of those who make only one article. Anything other than what they habitually produce is too much trouble and is better left to those who are accustomed to it. Consequently, although a woman whose craft is *jarros* is perfectly capable of fashioning a *cazuela* when she needs one, she is more likely to purchase the item from one of her neighbors who turns them out daily.<sup>7</sup>

There seems to be no relationship between a potter's age and *oficio* except for the tendency for younger women to avoid the large *apaxtles*, even when this article is their mothers' craft. Children make smaller editions of what their parents manufacture. Sex, however, is a determining factor. With a few exceptions only the men model the animals, the women claiming that they do not know how to do it. Men also work the *juguetes* but rarely make the domestic ware. Of the 21 male potters, one young boy forms *cazuelas* and a somewhat older man produces large *macetas* and medium-sized *apaxtles*.

*Barrio* specialization has been referred to in the literature as one of the distinctive features of Atzompa. A team of investigators, who did a survey of the crafts of the valley and visited the village in 1948, reported that each section of the town is dedicated to the manufacture of a particular type of ware.<sup>8</sup> Foster, who was there a few years later, is more specific, asserting that the potters living in the *Barrio Chiquito* make the small vessels while those in the *Barrio Grande* produce the big pieces.<sup>9</sup> However, I found very little association between the type of pottery made in a household and the location of the house in the village. A rough mapping of 92 households (see map on the facing page) shows that almost as many families making the small pots or *juguetes* are located in the large *barrio* as in the small, and 80 per cent of the 32 families who live in the little *barrio* make what Foster calls the big pottery--*ollas*, *apaxtles*, and *cazuelas*. Moreover, none of the other articles or kinds of finish cluster in a manner that indicates specialization along geographical lines.

Some pottery barrios did undoubtedly exist in the past, since the villagers refer to the northeastern corner of the village as the *comal barrio* and the southeastern part as "up there where the big *ollas* are made." *Barrios* could not have been maintained, however, unless patrilineal residence were the invariable rule, and the bride always switched to the *loza* made by her mother-in-law. Neither of these two conditions prevail without exception at the present time. The newly married couple occasionally goes to live with the bride's parents or sets up a separate establishment in another part of the village, and a number of women who live with their in-laws continue their mothers' *oficio*. The instability of marriage and the rather fluid state of many households, in which women leave their husbands and go to live with other men, contribute further to the variation within any one section of the community. It is likely, therefore, that geographical specialization was never perfect, and for many years has been more a convention than a reality.

## THE WORK CYCLE

The manufacture of pottery begins with mining the clay and ends when the finished pieces are packed for market. This work cycle, which varies from a period of one to three weeks, is carried out almost entirely in the home and involves almost all family members. The average household in Atzompa has two working potters, usually an older woman and her daughter or daughter-in-law, while in those in which the men work there may be as many as five people for whom pottery is a full-time occupation. The only members who do not participate in some phase of production are the small children and the young teen-age boys, although boys will help their mother if there is no other man in the house, and even six-year-olds can make themselves useful.

The potters use two kinds of clay (*barro*), both of which are obtained from quarries some distance from the village. A gray colored earth which fires an orange-red comes from San Felipe Jalapa, seven miles to the west. Mined by the inhabitants of San Felipe, it is sold to the Atzompeños at a cost of six pesos a *carga*, the equivalent of about 400 pounds. A black clay that fires to a light buff color is bought in San Lorenzo Cacaotepec, a village three miles away. In some families, the men go to these communities to purchase the clay, bringing it back in large bags which they sling on their burros. Others dislike the time and labor involved in the trip, which takes the better part of a day, and prefer to pay a few extra pesos to have a *carga* brought directly to their homes by one of the several men in Atzompa who make this kind of transport their business. The mines themselves are considered dangerous, and from time to time one or the other of them is closed down because of cave-ins caused by the rains or earthquakes.

A few of the potters regard the two types of clay as equally good and they use whichever is more readily available, or can be bought for a couple of centavos less. Most, however, have a preference which depends on the kind of ware they make. For glazed pottery San Lorenzo is considered better as "the green comes out more clear, more tender," while San Felipe results in a darker, somewhat muddy green that is thought ugly. San Lorenzo, on the other hand, is too soft for working the big pieces such as *ollas* and *apaxtles grandes*; *suelto* (loose) and *bofe* (light) are the potters' terms. These require the tougher consistency found in San Felipe, and, because of its red color when fired, this clay is more popular for all sizes of the half glazed pottery, the *ollas* that are left bisque on the outside and the *medio verde jarros*. With San Lorenzo clay, the unglazed part of a pot looks "very white, very sad." Although there is general agreement about the relative merits of the texture and color of the two clays, opinions differ as to which is the more resistant to the heat and less likely to break in the firing. By those who habitually use San Felipe, I was told that the other did not serve since it cracks open in the kiln, whereas families accustomed to San Lorenzo maintained exactly the opposite. In so far as I could observe, the two clays resulted in about the same amount of breakage, and when I asked Tía Lina about it, she agreed, adding, "It is just that each person thinks the kind of clay she uses is best, a perfectly natural belief."

A third variety of clay, known as the *barro de Crespo*, can be obtained on the outskirts of Atzompa from an open quarry that is free to anyone who cares to exploit it. Generally judged to be inferior in quality, Crespo is very soft and full of small stones, which have to be picked out when the pottery is being polished. It is suitable for *comales* which are flat and need little finishing, but it is rarely employed for other types of ware, unless nothing else is available, or a family is too poor to pay the price of San Felipe or San Lorenzo.

Like many Mexican potters, the Atzompeños use no temper,<sup>10</sup> but they do mix their clays with a gritty white earth that serves the same purpose, giving it a greater tensile strength. Called *barro de golpear* or *barro áspero* (clay to hit or harsh clay), it is added in amounts that vary according to the size of the vessel. For the small pots, only a sprinkling is put in; for the very large ones the proportions of the two kinds of earth are almost equal. Foster notes the use of this substance but calls it accidental and, according to the potters, not really necessary.<sup>11</sup> Yet I found that people were well aware of its properties

## 11. Preparing the Clay



Drying



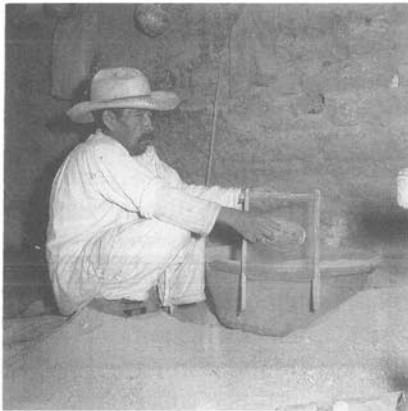
Crumbling



Mixing with water



Beating the *barro áspero*



Sieving



Adding the *barro áspero*



Kneading



and why they use it. I was told that without it the clay is too soft to work and the pots break in the oven. It was frequently pointed out to me that, whereas the Aguilers need only a little because they make the *juguetes*, "we who make the larger pottery need a great deal." The quarry for *barro áspero* is in the nearby *rancho* of Santa Catarina, where the men go to mine it or pay two pesos a *carga* to have it delivered to them. This mine, like the others, is dangerous because the best *barro* is deep inside and the roof is unsafe. It collapsed last year during the rainy season, and an Atzompa man was killed.

To prepare the clay, it is first spread out on a mat in the yard and exposed to the sun for two or three days. When it is thoroughly dry, it is crumbled into small chunks with the hands and cursorily examined for any unwanted material, such as vegetable matter and stones. Next, piece by piece it is dropped into a tub of water, worked with the hands and further broken up until a thick paste has been achieved. It should then be spread out again on a flat surface—often the bottoms of large *apaxtles* are used—and allowed to dry for twelve hours. When cracks appear it is ready to be kneaded. In the meantime, the *barro áspero* has been dried, beaten out to a fine powder with a club, and sieved through a metal screen. This work is usually done by the men. The job of kneading, though properly that of the men, more often falls to the women, who prepare it like dough for the tortillas, manipulating it back and forth on a stone slab while splashing on a little water. Few find it necessary to measure precisely the amount of *barro áspero* that should be added, knowing from experience what consistency is needed for the sort of pottery they are going to make. After the *áspero* has been well worked in, the clay is ready for use, although it is always better if it is allowed to stand for a day longer. Most families mix up as much as they think they will want for three or four days, storing it in *apaxtles* covered with wet leaves and rags to keep the clay moist.

Of the several methods of forming the pots, the most common involves the use of the revolving *molde*. The potter settles herself in her customary position, ordinarily inside the house and close to the door to get the benefit of the little light that enters. As it is, many are working in semi-darkness and for that reason, a few women prefer the kitchen shed or the porch if the house has one. These places are unsatisfactory, however, unless they are well sheltered from the wind to prevent the clay from drying out. At her side the potter has her pile of *lodo*, as they call the mixed clay, an *apaxtle* full of water, a small bowl of *barro áspero*, and her few simple tools—a *cuchara* or oval piece of gourd, the *cuero*, a small strip of leather, and the *molde*s, a number of circular earthenware slabs. In front of her is her modeling stand, an upturned pot on which one of the *molde*s is balanced in such a way that it can be rotated on the bottom of the vessel beneath it. Because of its globular shape, an *olla* makes a good base, providing a single point of contact for the two pieces, and allowing the *molde* to turn freely.

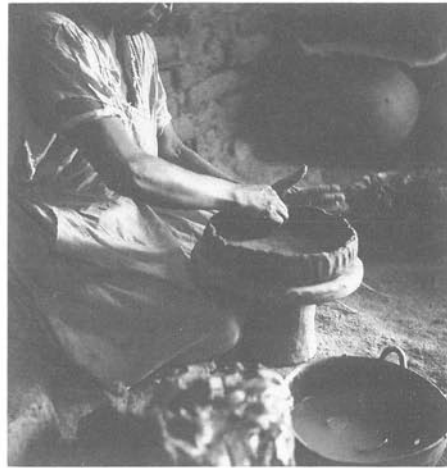
To make one of her large *cazuelas finas*, Juana Velasco, cousin and neighbor of the Aguilers, takes a wad of clay from her pile and shapes it into a flattish ball about five inches in diameter. This she pats between the palms of her hands, like a tortilla, further flattening and enlarging it. She sprinkles a little *barro áspero* on the *molde* to prevent sticking and slaps down her tortilla, adding more clay to the center and a thick roll to the outside. Rotating the *molde* slowly in a clockwise direction with her right hand, she pats hard with the palm of her left, working the clay outward and packing it down. She now has what appears to be a crude platter with low walls. To build up the walls, she pushes the rim from the outside with her palm, then pinches it up with her fingers, using both hands and still rotating the *molde* so as to keep the sides equal in height. From time to time she has been rinsing her hands in the water to clean them and to maintain the proper dampness in the clay. The next step is to go around the inside of the walls with her knuckle, forcing them up, while the other hand is held against the outside as a brace. A roll of clay is added around the top, pinched in, and knuckle operation repeated, until the walls are about two inches high.

Up to this point Juana has been "preparing", and now she is ready to *estirar* (pull, or stretch) the clay. She dips the *cuero* in water and, holding it loosely between her fingers so that the leather is in

## 12. Juana Velasco making *Cazuelas*



Patting the clay on  
the *molde*



Forcing up the walls  
with her knuckle



Beginning to *estirar*--  
smooth the walls



Scraping the bottom  
with the *cuchara*

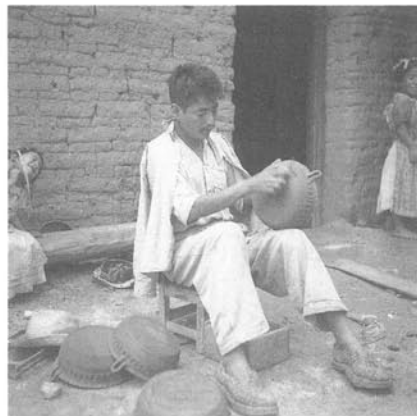
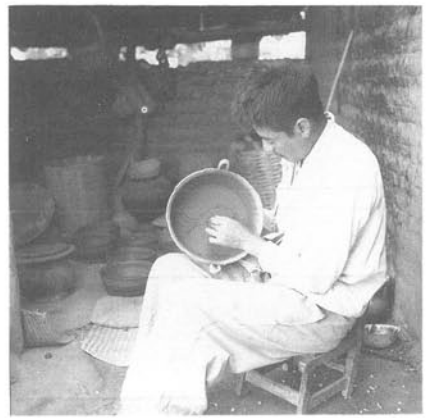


Finishing off the rim



Finished *cazuela*

### 13. Scraping and Decorating



contact with both sides of the rim, she turns the *molde* rapidly counter-clockwise which smooths the walls and pulls them up higher and thinner. The motor patterns in this phase of the work are swift and sure, approximating those of a potter working on a wheel. With the *cuchara* she goes over the inside of the vessel, smoothing off the bottom and removing excess clay. The final step is the *picas*, the scallop decoration around the top of the rim, which is done by gently flipping down the edge at small intervals with the index finger. The finished *cazuela*, about eleven inches in diameter and three inches deep, is set aside, still on its *molde*. It has taken Juana about twelve minutes to form it, and she will probably make ten to fifteen more before she stops work for the morning. Later in the day, when the pots are dry enough to be removed from the *moldes*, she will add the handles, small strips of clay that are curved into half circles and stuck on either side, the points of contact first having been moistened. Although there are women who make *cazuelas* faster than Juana, turning out as many as five dozen a day, their pottery is smaller and heavier and does not command the price that is obtained for the elegant, thin-walled vessels from the Velasco household<sup>12</sup>.

Following the forming, and before it is fully dry, the pottery must be scraped and, if it is to be left unglazed, polished. This work of finishing is supposed to be the task of the men, but if they are occupied with something else and the ware is piling up, it is done by the women. The bottoms of *cazuelas* and *apaxtles*, and the bodies of *jarros* and *ollas*, are gone over with a scraper (*raspador*), a thin strip of metal, to smooth any rough places and at the same time remove clay, making the pots "more delicate." Incidentally, this operation gives the potters a large pile of clay scraps which they carefully collect and put aside to be incorporated into their next batch of fresh *barro*. Polishing is done with a quartz stone, dipped in water and rubbed vigorously over all surfaces that are not to be glazed. Small holes or cracks are filled in with a dab of moist clay. Finally, if *cazuelas* and *jarros* are to have designs, they are incised by the men, who seem to find a long nail the best tool. They do their decorating—"from memory," drawing flowers, birds, and an occasional fish with a practiced hand, and with no preliminary sketches or patterns to guide them. The women are, by their own admission, unable to do the *dibujos*, but they can put the stamp decorations on the *jarros*, which must be done while the clay is still damp enough to receive the impression, and they make the small clay pellets used for this operation.

As the finished pots accumulate, they are stored in a corner of the house to await the firing. Families who make a fairly simple item—*cazuela*, *comal* or small *apaxtle*, or who have three to four working members, fire every week. The majority, however, need fourteen days to produce enough to fill a kiln, and a few wait for as long as twenty. This phase of pottery making is supervised by the men, but the women, and even the children, take part in it.

Almost every yard has a kiln or oven (*horno*) situated some distance from the house, as a spark could destroy a straw roof. Kilns are circular in shape, built of adobe and reinforced with stones or bricks. The fire box is below the level of the ground and excavated to a depth of about a foot, with a small entrance to permit the introduction of fuel. Above is the chamber for the pots, rising to a height of three feet and separated from the fire box by a grate consisting of a number of heavy adobe arches (*arcos*) which radiate from the sides and meet in the center like the spokes of a wheel. The overall diameter is generally three to four feet, but dimensions range from seven feet in the enormous *hornos* needed for the big *ollas* to those of miniature kilns used for *juguetes*, scarcely two feet across. Capacity is difficult to estimate since it depends on the type of ware being fired. Roughly, the standard kiln accommodates either fourteen dozen *cazuelas*, somewhat fewer *jarros*, three to three and a half dozen medium sized *ollas*, or four of the very large *apaxtles*. Each family constructs its own kiln, and with repairs now and then, it lasts for a period of about twenty years.

Any glazed pottery requires two firings. In Atzompa the first firing is customarily late Friday afternoon, with the second early Saturday morning so as to have the ware ready for market day in Oaxaca. Occasionally a family will push to complete both on the same day, but everyone tries to avoid

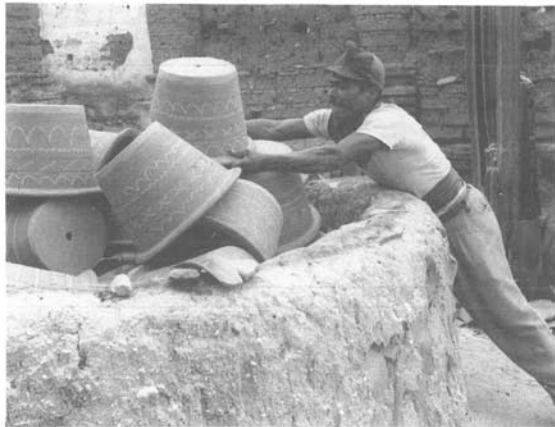
## 14. First Firing



Checking the pots



Kiln load of *cazuelas*



Packing the oven



Topping with sherds



Firing



firing under a noonday sun as the heat from the kiln is punishing enough. Shortly before the kiln is to be loaded, the pottery is brought from the house and spread in the yard where it is looked over. Handles are checked to make sure they are on tight, and any breaks or cracks are mended with *barro áspero*. The pottery is then stacked carefully into the kiln, the biggest pots put in first directly on the *arcos*, another layer on top of them, and so on until the kiln is full. Small pots are placed inside the big ones or fitted into the spaces between them. Although the kiln is not sealed, it is topped with shards, pieces of broken *ollas* and *comales*, that protect the unfired ware and provide some insulation.

While some members of the family have been busy loading the kiln, the children helping by bringing up the pots and handing them to the adults to stack, others have been out in the field behind the house collecting *basura*--corn stalks, dry brush, any trash that will burn, and carrying it to the kiln. When the last shard has been laid in place, *basura* is lighted in the entrance and shoved into the fire box. Fuel continues to be fed in for about an hour, giving off a very intense heat, great clouds of smoke, and much ash. At the end of that time a few shards are removed with wooden paddles and the top layer of pots examined. If they are of the right yellow color (red in the case of San Felipe clay), they have had enough fire and the kiln is left to cool for about half an hour. The unloading is done with long wooden poles with iron hooks on the ends. Everyone gathers around and fishes out one pot at a time, lowering it gently to the ground. The heat is still intense, and on a hot day very unpleasant. Often the poles catch fire and have to be extinguished in a pail of water. When the pottery is cool enough to handle, it is blown out and wiped with a rag to remove the ash, inspected for breakage, and sorted into piles according to which parts are to be glazed. By this time it is usually dark, and if the family does not want to glaze and fire again immediately, the pots are carried back into the house for the night.

The glaze used by the potters is made up of three ingredients, two of which are purchased in Oaxaca. The glaze proper (*greta*) is bought for four pesos a kilo, and copper sulfate (*cobre*), for thirty centavos an ounce. To one kilo of *greta* is added three ounces of *cobre* and one kilo of a white crystalline rock that can be picked up anywhere in Atzompa, and is crushed by pounding it on a stone with a hammer. A day or so before the first firing, these materials are mixed with water and ground in a mill. The mill has two heavy stones, attached to a vertical axle; they are rotated in a round stone basin by pushing on a horizontal bar (see plate 15). Grinding is a laborious job, requiring four to six hours and almost always performed by the men. Those who have their own mill do it at home; those who do not can rent one from one of the two families in the village who have several mills in their yard and charge a peso for their use. Or the ingredients can be given to Tío Luis, an elderly widower who makes his living grinding for other people at one peso per two kilos.

Glazing too, is ordinarily done by the men, with the assistance of their wives. The pottery is once more spread out, sometimes in the house but more often in the yard near the oven. From a large tub, the liquid glaze is dipped out with a gourd, poured into a pot, swished around the inside, and the excess drained back into the tub. If the object is to be *todo verde*, the outside is coated by pouring the glaze over it. Each piece is inspected as it is laid aside, to see that all surfaces are covered, and any bare spots are patched. Although the process appears to be a simple one, a good deal of skill is involved in getting an even coating because the glaze dries quickly and tends to cake. For this reason, a somewhat thinner solution is used for the inside.

The second, (*verde* or green) firing is similar to the first, except that wood is used; *basura* makes too much ash and dirties the glaze. Since Atzompa and environs have been pretty well deforested, wood must be bought, and most of it comes from San Felipe. The men of that village bring it in on their burros and sell it for five pesos a *carga*. The average kiln takes two *cargas* for each firing, so that fuel is one of the potters' major expenses.

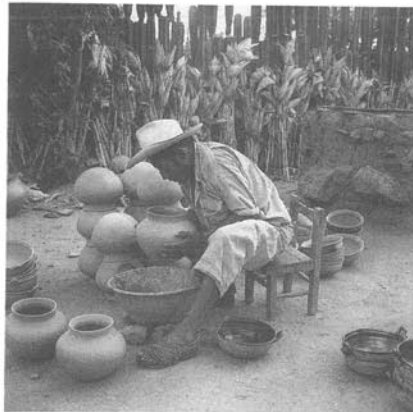
## 15. Glazing and Second Firing



The Aguilar's glaze mill



Glazing *cazuelas*



Glazing *ollas*



The glaze oven unpacked



Waiting for the pottery to cool

The *verde* kiln burns for about an hour and is unpacked immediately because pots glazed on the outside fuse together where they touch each other, if they are not separated while they are still hot. They are taken out almost glowing, and those that have stuck together are forced apart with a wooden paddle. Normally there is not much breakage, although pottery that has been on the *arcos* is sometimes warped from the excessive heat and the weight of the layers above. The glaze, however, does not always come out as it should, principally because the temperature is not constant throughout all parts of the oven. Pots at the top are apt to be chalky-looking as the result of too little heat, while those at the bottom are crystallized from too much. If a piece is taken from the kiln while the glaze is still molten, the finish has a gray, oxidized appearance. Some of these defects can be corrected by reglazing and firing again, but, as is, this pottery is unfit for the city market. Wind causes a great deal of trouble and when it is strong, the potters hold up a mat to try to screen the kiln. Even so, the fire often burns too hotly, the glaze runs all over the place, and the pots come out covered with little lumps. Scraping salvages some, but others have to be completely discarded. A high wind also cracks the unfired ware before it can be gotten into the oven, resulting in much loss.

As soon as the pottery is sufficiently cool, it is given its final inspection, sorted, counted, and packed into huge baskets to be transported to Oaxaca. *Comales* and *ollas* are netted together and *juguetes* put into bags. Some families take the ware to the city on their burros, but in the dry season most ship it on a truck which comes into the village four times a week to pick it up. Small loads can be carried on the bus, jammed inside with the passengers or lashed precariously to the roof.

The time spent on the various phases of the work cycle is difficult to judge with any degree of accuracy because, within a given period, different numbers of individuals are working, sometimes alone and sometimes together, and frequently they are engaged in doing different things. Further, the time necessary for a particular operation depends in part on the type of pottery being produced. *Ollas*, for example, have no appendages to be put on nor are they decorated, but they require more than the usual amount of scraping and polishing. I have attempted a rough estimate of time allocation for a fairly simple case, a man and his wife who make only *cazuelas* and turn out approximately twelve dozen a week.

Transporting the clay from San Felipe .....	1 day
Mining and transporting barro áspero (man) .....	1 day
Preparation of clay .....	1/2 day
Forming <i>cazuelas</i> .....	4 days
Putting on handles .....	1/2 day
Finishing: scraping and polishing .....	1 day
Grinding glaze .....	1/2 day
Glazing, firing, and packing .....	1 day

In most families there is no set schedule. The women keep at pottery as steadily as their household tasks allow, and often late into the night. The men work intermittently, when they are not occupied in the fields. With two women in the house many processes are speeded up; while with young children to be watched and cared for they are considerably slowed down. Occasionally, a woman who has no other women in the house to help her will try to cut down her housework by purchasing tortillas from one of the several *tortilleras* who peddle them from door to door, judging that she can more than compensate for the expense by what she can earn in the extra time spent on pottery. For the same reason she may send her laundry to one of the women who makes her living washing for others.

Every family, however, tries to plan on turning out a kiln-load of pottery within a specific period of time, whether it be one week or two, and the pace of work always increases toward the end of the cycle. The firing itself is a break in the routine and often something of a social occasion. Joint families composed of married brothers fire as separate units, but the brother's wife, an aunt, or a married daughter

may bring a few things to be put in the kiln, so that there is a large group working together. Or a neighbor may drop in, begging the favor of putting in a pot or two, and she is rarely refused since "one cannot deny the flame to anyone." While they wait for the firing or for the pottery to cool, people sit around, laughing, gossiping, and playing with the babies. After the pots have been packed and gotten off to market, there is a general lull. Part of the family is in Oaxaca tending to the selling, and the rest relax or do the little chores that they have had to neglect during the last few hectic days. The women comb their hair, wash the children, and tidy up the house. If it is Saturday, no one will seriously settle down to work again until Monday, and no matter what day of the week they complete and fire, most people allow themselves a vacation of twenty-four hours. At the Aguilers comparatively little was accomplished on the first two days of the new work cycle, especially as contrasted with the frenzied rush at the end. It was as though they were reluctant to take up the monotonous routine which they had been through a hundred times before.

Weddings, funerals, and fiestas come as welcome interruptions when work must be suspended. Yet few families can afford to lose all of the time involved in the longer religious holidays. During Holy Week most potters work in spurts between church services, and on Friday fire as usual before joining the procession to the Calvario. The custom of "going to Oaxaca on the Saturday of Glory for pleasure" is little more than a euphemistic way of describing the regular trip to market. Along with fiestas and special occasions, unavoidable delays in the weekly schedule are caused by sickness, by the fact that the burro has gone lame and cannot be used to bring in the *barro áspero*, or by the incapacity of the men, who have been celebrating too heavily at some social function, and are temporarily unable to do their share of the work.

In the rainy season, pottery production drops off sharply. The men are busy in the fields with the preparation of the land and the sowing, and the women with taking time to carry their food out to them. In addition, working conditions become almost impossible; nothing dries out properly, neither the clay before it can be mixed, nor the pots once they are made. Clay is more expensive since it is sold by weight, and when it is damp, the potters do not get their money's worth. Sometimes it cannot be obtained at all because of cave-ins at the mines. Dry wood is scarce and almost doubles in price. Normally two *cargas* are sufficient for an oven but now, even though the kilns are covered with sheet iron or tiles to protect them, the water seeps in and they require more fuel. Three or four *cargas* must be bought for the *verde* firing, and frequently the bisque also must be done with wood also because there is no dry *basura*.

The normal work cycle is disrupted because the firing cannot take place on schedule, and often as much as a month passes before there is a day clear enough to attempt it. Meantime, the unfired ware piles up and there is no place to put it. The storage problem is particularly acute for families who make the big *ollas* and *apaxtles* and, unless they have an unusually large house, they are forced to cut their output to a half or even a third of what they produce in the dry season. Clearing skies find everyone rushing to fire, and on the rare sunny days, many loads are fired at once. If the weather has been misjudged and any water falls on the pots while they are in the kiln, or have just been removed from it, they crack open and the whole load is lost. Transport is yet another problem. First the busses and then the trucks stop running, and the finished ware must be gotten to the city by burro, either by fording the river or by taking the long and muddy road through the hills. Finally, added to their other trials, is the fact that the rains bring an increase in sickness, and the potters are suffering from constant colds, grippe, and malaria. Small wonder that they complain of the hardships they endure in this season, and regard the summer months as the most unpleasant and difficult of the year.

## 16. Working Pottery on the Revolving *Molde*



The revolving *molde*



Working *comales*



Building the walls of a *jarro*



Rosa Cañada making *sartenes*



17. Juliana Torres working *Apaxtles Grandes*



Pounding clay on the *molde*



Starting the walls



Building the walls



Smearing on *longuitas*



Adding clay to the top



Finished *apaxtle*

## SOME EXAMPLES OF TECHNICAL PROCESS

### The Revolving Molde

With some modifications, the revolving *molde* is used in the production of all of the domestic pottery. Small *apaxtles* are made in much the same way as *cazuelas*, and require about the same amount of time and skill. Although there are no handles to be put on, a second operation is involved in the application of the *bordito*, a thick roll of clay around the top of the *apaxtle*, which constitutes its rim. This step is usually performed after the vessels have been scraped smooth on the inside and are semi-dry (leather hard).

For the small *ollas* and for *cocos* (the bowls of the *jarros*), the flat *molde* may be replaced by a shallow saucer which better fits the rounded contours of these pots. The walls are built up straight, as are those of the *cazuela*, but higher. They are then curved outward by the pressure of the *cuchara* which is held firmly against the inside with one hand while, with the other, the potter supports the outside and slowly revolves the piece. This process is known as *redondear* (to make round). A good deal of dexterity is required to achieve an even, well-rounded form, and at the same time avoid breaking through the walls. The *ollas* are finished off by adding a low neck, which is smoothed with the *cuero* or wet leather. The *jarros*, however, must be allowed to stand for at least a half a day before the *coco* is strong enough to support the tall neck (*pescuezo*); a heavy collar of clay is pinched around the mouth of the *jarro* and spun up high and thin with the *cuero*. In a third operation, the handles are put on. Flattened strips of clay are prepared by drawing them through thumb and forefinger, one end of the strip is pressed to the top of the neck, the middle curved upward in a loop, and the other end brought down and pressed firmly into the body. Both welds are reinforced with dabs of clay.

For the larger *ollas* and *apaxtles* the revolving *molde* technique is combined with coiling; the sides of the vessel are built up gradually by the addition of clay cylinders. Because of its size and the difficulty of balancing it, the *molde* rests directly on the ground rather than being raised up on an overturned pot; a small stone or a bit of felt embedded in the earth serves as a point of rotation.

The construction of big *apaxtles* can be observed at the home of Juliana Torres, an elderly potter who has been making them for forty-five years. She has already prepared the clay, a great mound of it piled in a corner of her small house, and her huge *molde* is set up near the door, almost blocking the entrance. She kneels beside it, breaks off a lump of clay, tosses it into the middle of the *molde*, and pounds it flat with her fist. She smears on more clay and continues pounding, always working the paste outward from the center towards the edge. Soon the surface of the *molde* is covered with a two-inch layer, forming an enormous circular disk which will be the bottom of the *apaxtle*. To test the thickness, she jabs into it with her finger, fills in the holes, and adds clay where she judges it is needed, "so that it will come out even." Next she rolls a lump of paste between the palms of her hands to make a *longuita*, a cylinder about nine inches in length. She shapes five or six of these, pinches one on to the edge of the disk, places another alongside of it, and makes the weld by smearing across both of them with her knuckle. She repeats the operation, each time rotating the *molde* slightly. When she has gotten back to the place where she started, Juliana makes more *longuitas* and begins to build a second row on top of the first. In this way, the walls rise vertically in a continuous spiral until they reach a height of about a foot and a half. With a long *cuchara* she now begins to scrape and smooth the surfaces of the vessel, working a little on the outside but concentrating on the interior. Because of its height, she has to kneel upright and strain forward to reach the bottom. From time to time she exchanges her *cuchara* for a corncob, which she wets and uses to go around the inside, gently forcing the walls outward in a slant. This considerably increases the diameter at the top, making the *apaxtle* broader and lower. After adding more strips around the top, and smoothing them with the *cuero*, she announces that she has done as much as she can, and that the clay must dry a little before she can put on the *bordito* and finish scraping the outside. It has taken her

## 18. Soledad Juárez building an *Olla Grande*



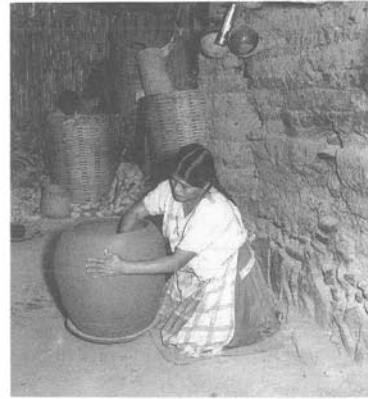
Patting clay on the *molde*



Adding the *longuitas*



Walls reach maximum height



Starting to round out



Reinforcing the top with  
more clay



Finishing off the rim with  
wet leather

an hour and a half, and almost a hundred pounds of clay, to construct her colossal pot which measures fourteen inches high and thirty-five inches wide.

While she has been working, Juliana has been swearing softly to herself and explaining to me how difficult it is to make "these great big ones". She grew up with this *oficio*, learning it from her mother, and it is "very heavy, very hard", "*este es muy pesado, muy trabajoso*". Although she has taught her craft to her three daughters, two of them have rejected it as too much work and have taken up medium-sized *ollas* instead. When on a subsequent visit I met Juliana's granddaughter who lived with her, I found that she too made medium *ollas* and wanted no part of the big *apaxtles*. They are twice the work, ("*muy doble*"), and it requires two people to lift one of them into the kiln. They take three or four hours to fire and sometimes they crack open and "*se pierde todo*", "everything is lost."

Big *ollas* are also *muy doble*, but here it is less a question of physical labor than of skill. Although the same coiling technique is used, the walls must be built up higher and thinner and then rounded out with the *cuchara*, as is done with the smaller *ollas*. If one does not know the exact amount of clay the walls will bear or the point at which they are firm enough to start the rounding operation, the whole structure falls down. Soledad Juárez is a master of this demanding *oficio*, and it takes her an hour and a quarter to make an *olla* nineteen inches high. She starts scraping the interior somewhat earlier than Juliana because of the difficulty of getting at the bottom, and she is the only potter I ever observed who used a measuring device, all others judging dimensions by eye. She has several sticks of various lengths with which she gauges height. Soledad does not complain about the hardships of her craft, perhaps because she is still a young woman, and she seems to derive some satisfaction from it. She remarked that her children ask why she scrapes and polishes her *ollas* so much since other women don't and they get the same price, but she replies that it pleases her to see them very smooth.

From the standpoint of both skill and labor, the *comal* appears to be the easiest item to work. A tortilla of clay is slapped into the center of a large *molde* which rotates on an upturned saucer and is the same shape and size as the finished piece. The clay is pushed outward with the *cuchara*; more clay is smeared on; and a row of *longuitas* is pinched on around the edge and then worked flat, making the rim somewhat heavier. The thickness is tested by probing with the fingers, after which, except for scraping, the *comal* is essentially finished. Ashes, sprinkled on the *molde* by the potter before she starts, prevent sticking and allow removal from the *molde* without difficulty. *Comales* are stacked in the kiln on edge, with a bit of shard between each one to keep them separated. Since they are not glazed, one firing is sufficient and *basura* can be used. With no expenses for wood or glaze, they are extremely cheap to produce and almost their only drawback is their fragility, as they break easily, even after they have been fired, and must be handled and transported with great care.

### Hand Modeling

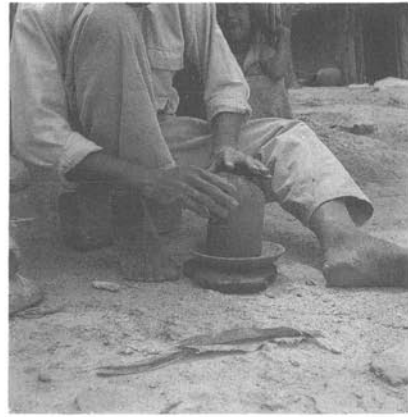
Although the revolving *molde* is by far the commonest method of manufacture, several other techniques are known and utilized. Of these, the most important is the hand modeling of *juguetes* and animal forms, including *chías*. With one or two exceptions, animals are the province of the men, the women considering this type of pottery beyond their capabilities. In the Torres household, Santiago and Pedro model horses, dogs, rabbits, and tigers, while their sister, Natalia, turns out *ollas* and *barrilitos* in the customary manner on a *molde*. Close by, in the same patio, lives another brother, Mariano, who also specializes in animals.

To make one of his tigers, Pedro pats out a tortilla of clay and folds it into a hollow cylinder. With his fingers inside, he enlarges the diameter of the cylinder, working the clay out toward the ends. One end is drawn together, and the opening sealed; the other is left open and worked up to form the neck. To one side of the neck he pinches on a flat piece of clay and curves it over, making the top of the head. More clay is added for the snout, which is shaped to a point and closed at the tip of the nose.

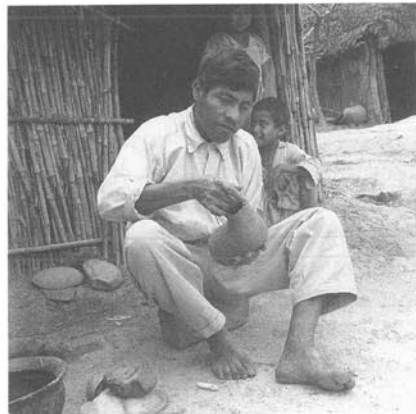
19. The Torres Family - *Loza Colorada*



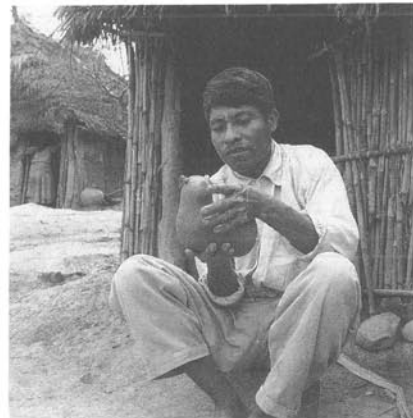
Pedro starting a tiger  
on the revolving *molde*



Pinching in the top



Working up the neck



Modeling the snout



Tiger fired red



Pedro then wets his hands and goes over the body, smoothing it and giving it more shape. He gives particular attention to the head, and when he has got it to his satisfaction, he puts on two dabs of clay for the ears. Up to this point he has been working with his hands, using no tools, but now he takes a small metal poker and cuts nostrils in the nose. Another shallow cut below makes the wide smiling mouth. Legs and tail are ordinarily put on after the body has dried a bit, but he does it right now so that I can watch him. He attaches a length of clay to each of the four corners, bending them slightly to represent the joints, and turning them up at the bottom to form the feet. A long wavy tail finishes off the back.

Pedro sometimes uses the revolving *molde* to make the body, which he works up in the same manner as the women do the *jarros* before they round them out.<sup>13</sup> Yet regardless of variation in process, the steps in modeling are always the same: first, the construction of a hollow cylinder, then the shaping of the body, and finally the addition of the appendages. This was the procedure of all the potters I observed working animals, no matter what the size or type. When at the Aguilers I modeled an animal from a solid lump of clay, the family was amazed, and though my artistic effort did not, as predicted, blow up when it was fired, no one cared to attempt this unnatural method of working.

Other products of the Torres household include *chías*, which are fashioned as are the other animals, and then given their striations by scraping them with a comb. Double-spouted water jugs are the *oficio* of Luisa Chávez, wife of Mariano, and Natalia occasionally makes small *apaxtles*, *cajetes*, and *vasinicas*, chamber pots, which she told me are used in the hospitals of Oaxaca. Most of their ware is *colorado*, painted with red slip. Slip is considerably cheaper than glaze, as it is made from an earth bought in San Felipe at two pesos for four kilos. Also, if the red ware is not glazed on the inside, it need be fired only once, the slip having been applied beforehand and thoroughly burnished with a quartz stone. The firing, however, is a delicate matter because, if the heat is not kept constant and the pots removed from the oven at just the right moment, they turn white. All members of the Torres family take a justifiable pride in their work, especially in its uniqueness, which they tend to overestimate, and in its diversity.<sup>14</sup>

Like the animals, *juguetes* are worked by the men, although they are not exclusively a male *oficio*. Of the ten families in the village who specialize in them, the Aguilers produce them in the greatest quantity, along with other types of fine pottery. Tío Tomás and his son, his sisters Tía Lina and Tía Tina, and Felipe's three daughters, manufacture the miniature pots, while Manuela, Felipe's wife, turns out vases, flowerpots, decanters, coffeepots, and sugar bowls. Felipe himself, and one of his sons, make small animals. Only José, a boy of twenty, has never learned pottery, devoting his time to the fields. All of the Aguilar ware is *todo verde* and, with the exception of the animals, *bordado*, decorated with fruit and flower designs in high relief.

*Juguetes* are modeled entirely by hand, and although the potters use what they call a *molde*, it is, in this case, nothing more than a convenient working table, usually the bottom of a large *apaxtle* placed on an overturned basket. Chica and María, the two oldest Aguilar girls, have their *moldes* set up in the back room with their clay and their water beside them. María begins her *juguetes* with a dab of clay which she pats into a flattened ball. In the center, she makes a shallow indentation which she enlarges with the fingers of one hand while rolling the ball in the palm of the other. This produces a heavy-walled cup, the sides of which she pinches up between thumb and forefinger. The crude form is then rounded out by placing the first two fingers, slightly bent, inside of it and again rolling it in the palm of the hand. Here the fingers are serving the same purpose as the *cuchara* when it is used to curve out the walls of *ollas* and *jarros*. Tapping the vessel gently on the *molde* to flatten its bottom, María sets it aside and starts another. The total operation has taken her only a minute and appears to be a simple one. My own experience, however, and my lumpy, misshapen products led me to the conclusion that it demands a good deal of skill. Hands must be kept clean and damp to prevent the clay from sticking to them, but, if they are too damp, the paste becomes too wet and is unworkable. If, in the initial rolling, one's fingers are not

exactly centered, the vessel comes out lopsided with walls too thick in some places, too thin in others. These defects are augmented rather than corrected in the process of pinching up, so that in attempting to round out the vessel, I inevitably broke through the sides or the bottom. All potters use exactly the same motor patterns, rotating the pot towards the body when they are pinching up and away when they are rolling it in their palm, but many months of practice are necessary before these patterns can be successfully imitated.

Following the shaping, *juguetes* must be finished off and given the details that will make them into replicas of the large ware--*jarros, ollas de aza*, etc. The top is pinched in to form the neck, excess clay is removed with a toothpick or a cactus spine, and the neck is spun smooth by applying the *cuero* and twirling the pot rapidly. Handles are added, spouts are put on the tiny coffeepots, and sometimes the vessels are given a foot or base that is smoothed even with the *cuero*. Each of these operations is performed as a separate step, twelve to twenty *juguetes* being worked on at a time.

The last step is the application of the *bordado* decoration. María prepares a number of small pellets of different sizes--flat ones for leaves and flower petals, round ones for buds and grapes. Starting in the center of the surface, and judging the relationship of the components of her design purely by eye, she applies the pellets one at a time, pressing them in firmly so that they will stick. The flower motifs are made first, then the leaves placed around them, and, finally, threads of clay to represent stems. She uses no tools other than a cactus spine to sharpen some of the forms and mark lines in the leaves. Like her sister Chica, she has a repertory of about twenty-eight designs, some completely different, others with only slight variations between them, and she usually produces two that are identical before going on to another kind. Both girls assert that the process of decorating is very hard work (*trabajoso*), and point out that their cousins, who live next door and also make *juguetes*, leave theirs *liso* (smooth and undecorated) because they do not want to be bothered with the extra work. I found the *bordado*, although complex in its effect, relatively easy to do, certainly less difficult than the initial modeling of the vessel itself. It does, however, involve another stage in production, and increases the time spent on each piece by two to three minutes.

In the Aguilar household, the technique of manufacturing *juguetes* has been extended to the large ware. My *comadre*, Manuela, resorts to the revolving *molde* for making plates, but works all other items by hand. The process is the same as described above, except that, in rounding out the pot, she uses her fist instead of her fingers, employing it as a sort of anvil to push against the walls and force them outward. As a surface for rolling, her lap substitutes for the palm of her hand, and she uses the *cuchara* to scrape and further round out the interior. Since I was unable to make the little vessels by this method, I did not attempt it on the larger ones, but it is obvious that it requires an even greater degree of skill and control over the clay.

The second firing of *juguetes*, and other types of *loza fina*, differs from that of the common ware in that all pots are completely glazed, so the adhesion problem is even more acute. This can be mitigated for the *juguetes* by putting them into little ovens (*hornillos*). These are earthenware basins with nails driven into them, on which to hang the pots to keep them separated. *Hornillos* occupy more space in the kiln than loosely stacked *juguetes* so it requires two firings for the amount of glazed pottery that can be fired bisque in one. Also there is more breakage with *loza* like that of the Aguilars than with the *corriente* ware, which is heavier and has fewer appendages. Handles are broken, coffeepots lose their spouts, and parts of the *bordado* designs chip or fall off. Yet, considering the fragility of the pottery and the speed with which it is handled during the packing and unpacking of the kiln, the normal loss in a week's work is surprisingly low, rarely exceeding five per cent.

## 20. The Aguilars - *Loza Fina*



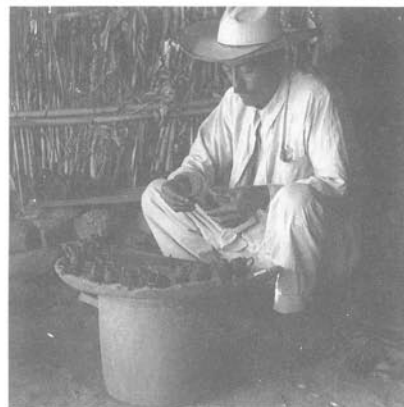
Chica and Maria working in the back room  
at night



Manuela working *jarros*



Maria pinching up a *juguete*



Tío Tomas making *juguetes*

## Secondary Techniques

Two techniques, the revolving *molde* and hand modeling, account for all but a fraction of the pottery produced in the village. Both methods are ancient ones, dating back to the Prehispanic period,<sup>15</sup> and the motor patterns associated with them are very similar. As employed in Atzompa, the *molde* is usually little more than a mobile base on which to rest the pot while it is modeled or clay is added in coils. Only in the last phase of the work when the rim is finished off with wet leather is this base turned with a rapidity approximating that obtained with the potter's wheel.<sup>16</sup> Foster reports essentially the same situation in Coyotepec, where the *molde* is also the principal means of production. Rosa Nieto, the virtuoso of that community, has perfected her technique to the point where she spins rather than merely rotates the pot, but her manner of working is, according to Foster, probably unique and not duplicated by the less gifted women.<sup>17</sup> Although I have observed what I would define as "spinning" in Atzompa, it is true that it occurs as a relatively short operation in the total process of forming the pottery and, as has been noted in the case of the Aguilers, can be done equally well by twirling the vessel in the hand. It is likely, therefore, that the one technique was derived from the other, that the *molde* was originally developed as an adjunct to hand modeling, and was used in much the same way as the men use it at the present time in making the animals. As a platform for modeling, it is found among potters in many parts of the world, although today its distribution in Mexico is restricted to the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas.<sup>18</sup>

The potter's wheel is by no means unknown in Atzompa. Much of the factory-made ware of Oaxaca city is produced on a wheel and, since some of the villagers have visited the workshops, they have had the opportunity to see it in action. Yet, with one or two exceptions, they have not adopted it, and it is not probable that they will do so in the near future. One of the male potters turns out *macetas* on a quasi-wheel, a disk that rotates on a fixed axis, but which must be regulated by the hands like the revolving *molde*. Two other men own kick wheels, and one told me he occasionally uses his for *jarros*. The second man, who had planned to learn how to make small *apaxtles* on a wheel, "because one can work faster that way," became discouraged over his failures and has decided that his young son will learn instead. These individuals are, to my knowledge, the only ones who have experimented with this mode of production.<sup>19</sup> Despite certain similarities to the revolving *molde*, the women will have nothing to do with the wheel, a resistance that is apparently shared by female potters throughout Mexico.<sup>20</sup> In Atzompa they say that it is unsuitable for the sort of pottery they make, but their attitude is perhaps better expressed in the remark of one of my informants. Commenting on some pictures of *jarros* from another town that I was showing her, she volunteered the information that they had been done on a wheel and added contemptuously, "But that is for people who don't know how to make *loza*."

A second technique that has been acquired from Oaxaca is the use of press molds.<sup>21</sup> This method has gained slightly more currency than the wheel, and is a substitute for hand modeling in several families where the men utilize it to produce animals. The processes involved are quite simple. The mold consists of concave identical halves which, when fitted together, form a cavity that is the size and shape of the article to be reproduced. Clay is pressed into these halves; they are joined, and the juncture is made by pushing and smoothing on the inside. The halves are removed, the weld or ridge down the middle of the animal, resulting from the joining, is scraped off, and appendages are added—legs, tail, and ears. Some men make their own molds from clay or plaster, others buy them in Oaxaca. In either case, their use requires a minimum of time and effort, and again it seems to be the attitude of the potters that stands in the way of a more general acceptance of the technique. Individuals who are known or suspected of employing molds are regarded as lacking the ability to make pottery in any other manner, and their products are unfavorably compared to those made completely by hand. Mold-made pots, it is claimed, are more apt to break in the firing, coming apart at the seams, and they are not as pretty. The mold-users themselves seem a little ashamed of their methods. In one household, molds were always hastily concealed upon my arrival, and in another I was assured that they were only samples, used to gauge the size of the animals modeled by hand.



## SOME OPINIONS ABOUT OFICIOS

The description of pottery making in Atzompa demonstrates clearly that different kinds of pottery require somewhat different processes and that not all of them involve the same amount of time and labor. This raises the question as to whether or not the potters themselves recognize differences, whether they consider some *oficios* to be more difficult than others. Some of their spontaneous comments would suggest that they do: the complaints of the women who specialize in the big *apaxtles*; the statement of a girl making *cazuelas* who said she enjoyed her work because hers was an easy *oficio*; the remark of an older woman, a *jarro-maker*, who told me she had a long-standing argument with her *compadres*, the Aguilars, as to which was the more *trabajoso*, *jarros* or *juguetes*.

To obtain more specific information about the potters' attitude on this topic, I asked a sample of 60 individuals which, of all the various articles produced in the village, they believed was the hardest to make and which the easiest.<sup>22</sup> The responses covered a wide range of items. Almost half of my informants mentioned more than one type of pottery in each category, but there was enough uniformity to indicate a definite climate of opinion. The *jarro*, the *juguete*, the large *olla*, or the large *apaxtle* was judged "hardest" by 88 per cent of the sample. Either the *cazuela* or the *comal* was judged "easiest" by 76 per cent. Sixty-six per cent rated the articles in exactly the same way; that is, they agreed in their ratings of both the "hardest" and the "easiest". There was little overlap between the two categories. *Cazuelas* and *comales* were never chosen as "hard", nor were small *apaxtles* except by one woman who makes them, and who on second thought decided that *juguetes* were still harder. Only five people thought *juguetes* the easiest and the four women who put *jarros* in this category are all *jarro-makers*. One of these qualified her answer by adding "Jarros are easiest for us". A man, who is not a potter but whose wife makes the large *apaxtles*, pointed out that this *oficio* is "heavy but not really difficult". The one person who considered big *ollas* easy was comparing them with her own complex specialty - decanters. Other than *juguetes*, specialties were rarely mentioned, perhaps because they are not produced in quantities great enough to be regarded as separate *oficios*.

For the most part, opinions are not affected by the age, sex, or *oficio* of the individual. Age is definitely not a determinant, and sex is important only as regards *juguetes* and *jarros*. Forty-five per cent of the women said that *jarros* are hard as against 23 per cent of the men, whereas *juguetes* were chosen by 43 per cent of the men and 5 per cent of the women. This difference may be due to the fact that *jarros* are a woman's craft, and *juguetes* are one of the few items worked by the men. In some instances, what the individual makes does seem to be a determining factor, but, because the sample is small and many people make more than one kind of pottery, it is difficult to pin down. There is some tendency to take one's own pottery as the standard for comparison, and judge other types accordingly. Thus many of the women who make *jarros* look upon *ollas* as easy, while the *olleras* are apt to consider *ollas* as hard as *jarros*, and chose their easy item from among *cazuelas*, *comales*, or small *apaxtles*. Although 39 per cent of the sample classed their own *oficio* as the most difficult, in all but three cases, they specialized in types judged "hard" by the rest of the respondents--*jarros*, *juguetes*, big *ollas*, or big *apaxtles*. In the "easy" category, the *cazuela-makers* agreed with the majority and chose their own pottery. Three out of the four *comaleras* did not, so that, perhaps, *comales* are more difficult to manufacture than an observer assumes they are.

Many of my respondents offered reasons for their choices, and these indicate that the term "hard" has somewhat different meanings when applied to different types of pottery. Used in reference to the large *apaxtles* it means sheer physical labor--"so much clay," "very hard work," whereas for the large *ollas* it has connotations of skill--"unless one knows how, they fall down." Skill also enters into judgments about *juguetes*. "They are so small and delicate"; "They have to be made completely by hand." With the *jarros*, it is a matter of neither skill nor labor but of "all those steps." This point was emphasized by 16 of the 27 people who thought *jarros* hard. "First the *coco* must be made, then scraped, then the neck put on, and finally the handle." Nobody seemed to regard any one of these operations as particularly difficult.



Rather, they were concerned with the number which had to be performed, and the time required to turn out the finished article. There were similar remarks about the *juguetes*--"lots to handle," "all those decorations to be put on." Considerations of time also entered into judgements about which types are easy. Although several informants cited the flatness of the *comal* as the reason for its being a simple item to work, the rapidity with which it can be produced was a more frequent explanation. "It needs no glazing"; "It can be fired and sold immediately." So too with the *cazuela*. "A few turns of the *molde* and it is finished; with *ollas* one delays longer."

The way in which potters, and members of potters' families, evaluate the various *oficios* shows that they have a clear and reasonably objective conception of what is involved in each of them. Although most individuals specialize in only one kind of pottery, and many have never made anything else, they know and are, in some measure, able to appreciate the technical problems faced by other potters. Only three of my informants regarded all types as equally difficult and one went on to explain why. "Each person has his own *oficio* and all the others seem hard. For us, even the *comal* is hard, because we don't know how to make it, but once one is accustomed to one's own work, it seems easy." The notion of being accustomed to one's work is common and was frequently expressed by other informants. Even potters making the largest vessels feel that, although these articles are laborious, their hands are now accustomed to them and could never get used to working with the smaller sizes.

The marked concern with time -- "hard" items are those which are slow to produce, the "easy" ones are those which can be turned out quickly-- might be called a psychology of mass production, and it follows naturally from the conditions under which the potters work. They are not regimented, as they would be in a factory, and a woman more or less schedules her working hours as she sees fit. Nonetheless, she is under constant pressure to finish a specific amount within a specified period. To fall behind with the day's quota means a reduced income at the end of the week. To speed up the processes, she has divided them into a number of separate operations. For each, she handles the ware in lots of a dozen to a hundred. Although she is working in a domestic industry with hand methods, ancient techniques and simple tools, she has pushed it to the limit to achieve quantity production.

#### Notes to Chapter 4

1. The majority of this 30 per cent do no farming, not from choice, but because they have no lands. It is my guess that when *ejidos* were granted to villages in the Oaxaca area, Atzompa got fewer than the purely farming communities, since one of the stipulations was that individuals receiving grants must habitually earn the greater part of their income from farming. Whetten, 1948, p. 182.
2. For reasons which will be explained below, the proportion of male potters in my sample of families is higher than it is in the village as a whole. I would judge that less than 10 per cent of the males in Atzompa are practicing potters.
3. Van de Velde, 1939, p. 41.
4. Foster, 1955, p. 22.
5. In my survey of the 104 households, I found that of the 92 who practice pottery, 15 per cent make only *ollas*, 13 per cent *apaxtles*, 13 per cent *jarros*, 10 per cent *cazuelas*, 3 per cent *comales*, and 7 per cent specialties.
6. The number of individuals producing specialties is higher in this sample than it is in the total population of Atzompa since I sought out and included all those families who made a different kind of ware. As it is usually the men who make the specialties, this is why my sample also has a higher proportion of males.

7. See the sections on Technical Processes and on Opinions (especially p. 90) for the objective reasons a potter would not find it expedient to interrupt her normal routine to make a type of pottery she does not customarily produce.
8. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1949, p. 599.
9. Foster, 1955, pp. 23-24.
10. Temper is any extraneous material that is added to the clay to give it more body and strength; sand or ground-up pot shards are the commonest types. Sayles reports the use of pulverized pot shards in Atzompa for the large *ollas*, but I neither observed nor heard of this kind of temper in the village. Sayles, 1955, p. 955.
11. Foster, 1955, p. 24.
12. The technical processes involved in the production of the other types of pottery will be discussed in the next section.
13. Compare the first photograph on plate 19 with the one of a woman building the walls of a *jarro* on plate 16.
14. See plates in Appendix III, Series 4, for two examples of water jugs by Luisa Chávez.
15. Foster, 1955, p. 28.
16. The potter's or kick wheel was introduced into Mexico by the Spanish and consists of a wooden disk mounted on a vertical axis which connects it to a larger disk below. By pushing on the lower wheel with his foot, the potter regulates the speed of the wheel above on which he works the clay. With this device most pottery can be produced a good deal faster than with any of the purely hand methods.
17. Foster, 1955, pp. 31-32.
18. Foster 1955, p. 31.
19. One student who has visited the village has stated that all of the green glazed ware is made on the kick wheel. Sayles, 1955, p. 957. Her inaccuracy probably stems from the fact that she happened to observe the process of pottery making in one of these three households.
20. Foster states that this resistance is perhaps the only constant in Mexican pottery making. Foster, 1955, p. 31.
21. Press molds were used in parts of pre-Conquest Central America, but those found in Mexico are probably of Spanish origin. Foster, 1955., p. 29.
22. The sample is actually 66 individuals but 6 did not respond because I did not ask them the question. See Appendix I for the exact wording of the question.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ECONOMICS OF POTTERY

#### MARKETING, PRICE, AND DEMAND

Of the tons of pottery produced each week in Atzompa, the greater part goes directly into Oaxaca City. There, it is either sold by the potters themselves, or put into the hands of merchants or middlemen (*regatones*), who resell it in the Plaza de la Industria, the pottery section of the city's huge open air market. The *regatones* also distribute the ware to local markets throughout the state, shipping it to distant points and taking it out to nearby valley towns--Mitla, Tlacolula, Ocotlan.

About two-thirds of the potters do their own merchandising, which is known as selling *en puesto*. They arrive in the city early Saturday morning, market day, some bringing their pots with them by burro or by bus, others having sent them on ahead by truck. Frequently, the whole family makes the trip, coming to shop as well as to sell, and to enjoy a break in the weekly work routine. From all of the outlying villages similar families are pouring in loaded with their goods--sarapes, charcoal, baskets, live chickens, fruit and vegetables. By nine o'clock the market is jammed, and it is almost impossible to push one's way through the crowd. In the pottery plaza, or in an adjacent street, each Atzompa family looks for a place (*puesto*), a few feet of curbstone, for which it pays a fee of one peso to the municipal government. Here they spread their wares and spend the day, selling sometimes in lots of a dozen, more often a pot at a time. The women do most of the trading, whether their husbands are present or not, and tend to be the sharper bargainers. Normally, business is brisk, and by evening, the pottery has been disposed of. However, it has required one full day in the market, and sometimes two. When sales are slow, a family will often find it necessary to stay the night in Oaxaca and try again the next morning, to avoid taking unsold pottery back to the village.

Atzompeños who do not sell in the open market deal with the *regatones*, many of whom maintain permanent stalls in the plaza and handle the ware of Oaxaca city and Coyotepec along with that of Atzompa. These merchants, many of whom are women, place orders with the potters for specific amounts of pottery. Essentially informal and unwritten contracts, the orders are usually for large quantities of the type of pottery customarily made by the family. They continue unchanged from one week to the next, although occasionally particular items are requested. The potter is thus assured of a steady outlet for her work. She has only to get her products into the city, deliver them to the *regatones*, and collect her money. Sometimes she is saved the bother of transporting the pots, as the *regatones* come out to the village to pick them up, or send in trucks. The potter receives less money, however, by selling on order (*encargada*), than she would if she did her own vending.

Which of the two methods of marketing is utilized by a family seems to depend on personal preference. The difference is, to a degree, the difference between retail and wholesale. Yet, even when she is selling *en puesto*, many of a potter's customers are *regatones*, either from Oaxaca or from other parts of the state, who are buying in quantity for resale. Frequently, if the potters were willing, these merchants would give them contracts for regular deliveries. A potter's choice of method, therefore, is not based on inability to obtain orders, nor is it determined by the type of ware the family produces. The Aguilers, the Torres, and many others make the *loza fina* work only on order, but so do many of the *corriente* potters and, conversely, much of the *loza fina* is sold *en puesto*. Rather, it seems to be a matter of individual judgment as to which method is economically more profitable--the somewhat higher prices, which can be obtained in the open market, with the attendant long hours and the risk of poor sales, or the security of assured sales, quickly transacted, which entail the sacrifice of the retail markup. The figures show that the majority of families have chosen the open market, although they will on occasion take orders from

the *regatones*; just as those who ordinarily sell on order will vend some of their ware in the plaza, if the *regatones* do not take all they produce.<sup>1</sup> The potters are well aware that there are disadvantages to them in either system. Juana Velasco explains that she sells her *cazuelas en puesto* because one gets more money that way, but it takes a long time and, when the *loza* moves slowly, she may have some left over at the end of the day. The Aguilars realize that they are losing money by dealing with the *regatones* but point out that "one delays much in the plaza." For everyone, time and money are the principal considerations. It is just that families differ as to which they regard as the more immediately crucial.<sup>2</sup>

Compared to Oaxaca City, Atzompa is of minor importance as a commercial outlet. Only a small portion of the total production is distributed direct from the village. Four of the villagers, one woman, formerly a potter, and three men who are potters' husbands, have set themselves up as *regatones*. They take the ware made by their own families, add to their stock by purchasing from some of their neighbors, and make the rounds of the larger valley towns on the days when the weekly markets are being held—Tlacolula on Sunday, Ocotlan on Monday, and so on. Here they establish *puestos*, competing with the *regatones* from the city, who have also come to the rural areas to sell pottery, including that of Atzompa. Margarita Pérez, the woman *regatón* from Atzompa, goes further afield, south to the Isthmus and Vera Cruz, north to Mexico City; she most closely approaches the status of a professional merchant. For the Atzompa men, marketing is a part-time activity, carried on in addition to farming, and in seasons when they are not busy in the fields. It is also apt to be a temporary occupation taken up for a few years when a man has a little extra capital he would like to increase. One young man became a *regatón* with the money he had earned in the States as a *bracero*; he kept at it only long enough to accumulate enough to build a house and get married. It is not an occupation of which Atzompa wives particularly approve, as they feel that their husbands spend too much time drinking in the *cantinas* of the towns they visit.

Outside of the local *regatones*, few Atzompeños travel to communities other than Oaxaca to market the pottery. The exceptions (in my sample) are three women who often send their husbands to peddle their *comales* in the surrounding ranchos. Another potter mentioned that, when the *loza* is not selling well in Oaxaca City and vicinity, her husband takes her *ollas* by bus to Nochixtlan, a town about fifty miles to the north, where he can get better prices for them. Most families confine themselves to vending their pots once or twice a year at a fiesta in some adjacent village.

The volume of business done inside the village is small. Since the potters rarely keep any finished ware on hand, it is difficult to buy it unless one has placed an order or happens to arrive at a house just as the kiln is being unpacked. Pottery is not sold in any of the village stores, nor are there stalls or *puestos* in the village plaza. Most transactions are carried out in the potters' homes. Three or four families regularly deal with local *regatones*, and, occasionally, merchants from neighboring towns come to request ware which they will return to pick up the following week. Women from San Jacinto, San Felipe, and Cuilapam drop in, looking for "two *floreros* for a saint in a church," "a large *jarro* for beating chocolate," "a couple of *chías* to plant at Holy Week." Usually these customers are buying for their own use, and want damaged *loza* for a reduced price. Sometimes the sale is made by bartering one commodity for another.<sup>3</sup> If the customer has no money or is a peddler, she will offer fruit or vegetables in amounts which equal the money value of the pot. Similarly, when a potter needs a type of ware she does not produce herself, she may offer something the seller can use, say small *jarros* worth \$0.20 apiece, and will give two of them in exchange for the small *comal* she needs, which the seller values at \$0.40.<sup>4</sup>

The trading that goes on in the Atzompa plaza on market day is almost entirely in seconds, pottery that is in some way unfit for the city market. Every Tuesday, Chica and María Aguilar were sent to the plaza with a basket of broken *juguetes*, a couple of decanters with glaze faults, a plate or two that had warped in the firing. These they disposed of at half price, usually to a woman from ETLA who sometimes gave them orders for undamaged *loza*. There was always a sprinkling of other families, who

## 21. Marketing



The pottery plaza in Oaxaca



Packing the pottery



Atzompa--taking seconds to the plaza



Margarita Pérez selling  
in Tlacolula



had brought their seconds to the plaza, hoping to acquire a few pesos for pottery which would otherwise be a dead loss.

A few Atzompeños have done business with North Americans who are interested in seeing how the pottery is made or in buying it. Most are tourists; they watch the potters at work, tip them, and perhaps purchase a pot as a souvenir, if the family happens to have any in the house. Others, however, are buying native handicrafts for resale in the United States, and leave orders for large amounts. The Aguilers have sold to North Americans several times, and have shipped their *jugueteres* once to New York and twice to Texas; some of the other families, producing the specialties, have made similar transactions.

The price of the pottery is determined by a number of interrelated factors--by size and finish, by the quantity in which it is sold, by the distance of the market from Atzompa, and by method of sale, *en puesto* or delivered to the *regatones*. Values fluctuate with seasonal changes in demand and from the fact that, in any transaction not contracted beforehand, the final price is arrived at through prolonged bargaining between buyer and seller. Nonetheless, every potter knows the worth of her ware and will quote a definite figure when questioned by a person whom she does not regard as a prospective customer.<sup>5</sup> This is usually the amount she expects to get, and will average, by selling *en puesto* in the Oaxaca market or, if she deals with the *regatones*, what they normally pay her. With few exceptions, her prices are comparable to those of other women who make the same kind of ware; thus, there is a standard value, though not a rigidly fixed one, placed on the pottery.

The primary determinants of price are the time and the costs of production. It is labor and materials rather than demand which make the *loza fina* more expensive than the *corriente* pottery. The difference between selling *jarros medio verde* at \$15.00 per dozen and *todo verde* at \$18.00 is due to the cost of the additional glaze. So too, glaze costs are a factor for *cazuelas*, although here time is a factor. A large *cazuela, medio verde* and undecorated, brings about \$1.00, whereas a *fina*, fully glazed, and with designs etched in by the men, is worth \$1.25 to \$1.50. As many potters pointed out to me, the cost of the glaze at \$4.00 per kilo, (as against that of the red earth at \$0.50), the wood for the second firing, and the added work of firing twice, account for the price difference between the *loza colorada* and the glazed pottery. In the large *apaxtles*, it can amount to 40 to 50 per cent, a *colorada* one, measuring thirty-one inches across, being valued at \$10.00, while a glazed *apaxtle* of the same size is \$14.00 to \$15.00. As a result of the extra time the Aguilers spend putting *bordado* designs on their *jugueteres*, they obtain about \$0.08 more on each one than their cousins next door, who leave theirs undecorated.

Price varies, of course, with size, and often a half an inch more in the height or width of a vessel is enough to warrant a \$0.05 to \$0.10 increase. This again reflects the cost of the glaze, and in the case of the very large pots, the clay and the labor. Price is also modified by the quantity the purchaser takes. Most potters, when asked about price, quote it by the dozen as well as by the individual piece, and for the *jugueteres*, by the gross, the amount in which the miniature ware is most frequently sold to the *regatones*. For some items the price is the same. *Chías*, for example, when \$1.50 each are \$18.00 per dozen. I found this to be generally true for all the animal forms, perhaps because they are not often sold in quantity. Usually, however, there is a reduction, which amounts to two units free of charge. That is, in buying *cazuelas* for \$10.00 per dozen, instead of for \$1.00 each, the buyer saves \$2.00 or the price of two *cazuelas*. The same holds for a gross of *jugueteres* which is \$25.00 as compared to \$2.50 per dozen. Sometimes the saving is a little less, sometimes a little more, but clearly the potters are encouraging their customers to buy in large lots. Regardless of whether they are selling *en puesto* or to the *regatones*, they offer what is essentially a discount to move their ware quickly and in quantity.

Where, how and when the pottery is sold are additional factors affecting its value. The further from Atzompa it is marketed, the more it brings, although the difference between the village and Oaxaca city is not great. Transportation costs are low--one peso to ship in a large basket of the ware, When

selling an undamaged pot to a neighbor, a potter will take only a few centavos less than she would expect to get in the city. At a distance of fifteen miles, however, in the market at Tlacolula, there is a perceptible increase in price. An *olla*, which is locally worth \$3.00 brings \$3.50 or even \$4.00. Farther away, in Nochixtlan, the difference is still greater. A small *olla*, which rarely brings more than \$1.00 in Oaxaca or Atzompa, can be sold for \$1.50, while a large *cazuela* rises in price from \$1.00 to \$2.25. Yet the journey is expensive, and few potters judge it worthwhile to make the almost hundred-mile round trip.

It is evident that, for the potters, the value of their products declines when they sell to the *regatones* rather than on the open market, but it is difficult to estimate exactly how much money they are sacrificing. When a potter is selling *en puesto*, dealing in large quantities and letting her pots go at what are essentially wholesale prices, the amount is probably not large. On the other hand, several of my informants gave me figures which indicate a sizable loss: *ollas grandes*, \$15.00 each in the Oaxaca plaza and \$10.00 to the *regatones*; *ollas medianos*, \$14.00 per dozen in the plaza and \$10.00 to the *regatones*. It is my guess that here the potters are comparing the best that can be obtained in the plaza with some of the lower prices paid by the *regatones*. These vary with the season, the demand for the pottery in question, and the personal relations between the potter and the merchant, some of which are strictly on a business basis, others institutionalized by *compadrazgo*. The *regatones* cannot afford to set their figure too low, or more potters would refuse to deal with them, and as buyers they are competing with each other. I would estimate the average difference to be about 25 per cent, and somewhat less for the specialties like the animal figures, the *juguetes*, and the decorated *loza*. Unlike the *corriente* ware, some of this pottery is not mass-produced, and during most of the year all specialties sell very well.

The *regatones'* markup is not excessive by North American standards, but it seems so to the potters. As they see it, the *loza* is bought from them for very little and sold "*muy caro*--very dear." One woman pointed out that her *cajetes* are ordered from her at \$9.00 for the dozen (\$0.75 each) and then resold individually for \$1.50 or \$2.00. Another, after remarking that the *regatones* often get double what they pay for the pottery, expressed additional resentment over the fact that they can obtain more than she can when she sells *en puesto*. "They are at their stands all day, so they don't have to take any price offered as we often do. They profit from our work." It is quite true that the *regatones'* prices are usually higher than those which the potters average, when doing their own selling, and for the reason mentioned by my informant. Marketing from permanent stalls, they are not under the necessity of unloading all of their merchandise in one day, and they are in a better position to turn down offers which they think are unreasonable. Yet, their margin of profit is rarely as great as the potters assume. Although it may be as much as 100 per cent in the first asking price, it is more frequently between 50 and 60 per cent, and can easily be bargained down to 33 per cent. I have seen merchants take as little as 20 per cent markup above cost. If the Atzompeños consider these profits exorbitant, it is perhaps just as well that they are unaware of the markup put on their products by their occasional North-american customers. Because of the shipping costs and the duty, the *loza* is seldom retailed in the United States for less than 300 per cent of what has been paid for it.<sup>6</sup>

With the exception of the relatively fixed amounts paid by the *regatones* for standing orders, the final price in all transactions is the result of bargaining<sup>7</sup>. In the bargaining I observed in the Oaxaca market, in Tlacolula, and in Atzompa at the plaza or at the Aguilers when customers came to the house, the buyer's first offer was from 25 to 40 per cent lower than the asking price. Gradually, and usually by intervals of five centavos, both parties advanced toward a midpoint and agreed on a sum that was 11 to 25 per cent less than the original asking price. Most of the transactions are between women, and they followed what seems to be a standard pattern. The buyer expresses shocked surprise upon hearing the amount demanded by the seller. The latter then proceeds to justify her price by speaking of the high expenses for glaze, the recent rise in the cost of wood, and the qualities of the pot, which could never be purchased so cheaply anywhere else. There are always several statements as to the "absolutely lowest" (or highest) figure that either could bring herself to consider, and somewhere, in the middle of

negotiations, it is customary for the buyer to stalk off in disgust. Occasionally the buyer takes possession of the pot and starts to carry it off, repeating the amount she is willing to give, whereupon the seller grabs it back, saying no, and repeating her price. A yes-and-no type of dialogue may go on for some minutes, and the pot changes hands several times, before either woman will relent and name another figure. When the haggling is between friends or acquaintances, it is generally on an amicable basis, accompanied by jokes and good-natured jibes. It can also become a lively argument, verging on a fight, with screams of "You're trying to rob me," "You're quibbling over five centavos." Only rarely, however, is a sale not completed once the bargaining has started and, despite the prolonged and rather elaborate game involved in reaching an agreement, the final figure is close to, if not actually representing, what both parties know to be the value of the article in question. Except at the end of a long Saturday in the Oaxaca plaza, when a potter may lower her asking prices in order to sell off the last of her pots, she cannot be forced much below what she considers them worth. In most cases bargaining does not seem to cause the price to vary by more than five to ten centavos for similar pottery under similar circumstances.

Eight months out of the year, from October to May, Atzompa pottery is in steady demand, and the villagers have no trouble selling all they produce. For the *corriente* ware, there is a good market throughout the state, especially in the Valley of Oaxaca where there are almost no competitors.<sup>8</sup> It does not sell quite as readily in the Isthmus, since several towns in that region turn out their own *loza*, and on the northern borders it is rivaled by the utilitarian brown ware of Puebla. In Vera Cruz where little glazed pottery is manufactured, Atzompa *ollas*, *cazuelas*, and *jarros* are popular and are shipped into the state in quantity. The *loza fina* has a wider distribution but in smaller volume. There is not much demand for it in rural areas. Outside of some undecorated *jugueteres*, I noticed almost none in the Tlacolula market, and the *regatones* there said they hardly ever took it out to the smaller towns because it is too expensive for most of their customers. The one exception is the *chías*, but they are seasonal, selling extremely well at Easter and poorly during the rest of the year. It is chiefly in the cities that the *loza fina* finds a market. In Oaxaca it is sold from the stalls of the *regatones* and is carried in some of the small retail shops catering to the tourists. Belón, the owner of a large commercial establishment dealing in regional handicrafts, takes everything produced by Teodora Blanco, her musical animals and her bird jugs, and, through her, he occasionally orders from other potters who make the specialties. Some of these items he ships to other urban centers, including Mexico City. More decorated ware reaches the capital through the Oaxaca museum, which sends it up from time to time to be displayed and sold in the Popular Arts Museum, along with the black pottery of Coyotepec. When I inquired there about Atzompa *loza*, I was told that they did not receive much of it, but what they got sold well.

During the rainy season, the same period when production falls off, there is a sharp decline in demand. Starting in late May or early June sales become *muy flojo*, "very lazy" and remain that way until mid September or October, while prices drop from 25 to 50 per cent. This condition, which seems to contradict the law of supply and demand, apparently prevails throughout Mexico in these months. The potters understand it in terms of the economy of their own locality, explaining that before the harvest people are poor, and since they must buy corn which is very dear at this time, they have no money left to purchase pottery.<sup>9</sup> Several informants mentioned other causes which may be contributory factors: many of the *regatones* are farmers and, because they are working in the fields during this season, they are not buying pottery; the roads are washed out or full of water, so that the trucks which carry the *loza* to other places are not able to pass. Yet, regardless of how they account for it, all potters are in agreement over the results—that it is a miserable period of the year for them. Their costs have risen, they can produce less, and what they can produce they have difficulty selling. It is particularly hard on the families who sell *en puesto*; for them it means long hours in the market and small profits. Those who work on order can continue delivering to the Oaxaca *regatones*, although at somewhat lower prices. Families making the tourist specialties are less affected than the *corriente* potters, since their consumers are not, for the most part, among the rural population which makes its living directly or indirectly from

farming. The Aguilars are always able to dispose of their *loza*, no matter what the season, which is, according to them, one of the reasons why they make the decorated pottery.

Towards the end of September, after the harvest is in, sales begin to pick up, and by October they are back to normal. *Todos Santos* and the Day of the Dead, which fall at the last of October, constitute a peak period for many items. Glazed *apaxtles* and *cajetes* to cook the fiesta foods, large *jarros* for serving chocolate, and *floreros* to take to the cemeteries and decorate the graves are in special demand, and the potters adjust their production accordingly. Those whose *oficio* is *ollas* devote themselves to making *cajetes*; *apaxtle*-makers glaze all of their ware instead of giving some of it a *colorado* finish, and women who ordinarily make half glazed *jarros* turn them out all glazed, because their customers are willing to pay a little extra for fine pottery at this time of year.

## THE ECONOMICS OF PRODUCTION

Whereas distribution and marketing are complex affairs, necessitating a network of commercial relationships that spreads far beyond the limits of the village, the economics of production are still fairly simple. Basically, pottery remains a home industry, in which each family is a nearly self-sufficient work unit, dependent on others only for the raw materials which it uses. Most of these come from the outside--the clay from San Felipe and San Lorenzo, the wood for firing from San Felipe, and the glaze from Oaxaca. This puts Atzompa in the position of a consumer as well as a producer in reference to these communities.

Within the village, there is only a slight development of economic activities related and subsidiary to the manufacture of pottery. A few families buy up extra quantities of raw materials. Rosaria Cañada carries glaze which she obtains at \$4.00 a kilo, like everyone else, and resells for as much as \$5.00 to potters who cannot get into the city or find at the last minute that they are short. She and several other women with sufficiently large houses to store it, keep on hand a supply of wood which they sell when they can. Rosa claims she raises the price only from \$5.00 to \$6.00 per *carga*, but the Aguilars say she charges \$8.00 or \$9.00, and they never buy from her unless they have to. Most of the other villagers follow the same practice, consequently neither she nor the other "merchants in wood" do much business except during the rainy season when dry fuel is at a premium. There are two families that have extra glaze mills which they rent out to those who have none of their own, and there are men who transport and deliver clay. These services are not widely utilized and, for the individuals offering them, they are sidelines which they carry on in addition to pottery making or farming. Only Tío Luis, the elderly man who grinds glaze, attempts to earn a living in a secondary occupation, and he does not get enough customers to make grinding a full-time job.

Economic transactions, known as buying and selling *crudo*, take place between certain families in the village. A small number of potters (six out of 59 in my sample) do not fire their own ware, either because they have no kiln and have not gotten around to building one, or are women who have no man in the house to help them; they are widowed or divorced, or they have husbands who are, for some reason, not available to assist them. Under these circumstances, they make pottery which they then sell unfired, *crudo*, to other families who glaze, fire, and market it along with their own products. The Aguilars are among those who frequently buy unfired pottery, obtaining *cazuelas* from Juana Marquez who lives directly behind them. Juana's husband is a mason, often away from home working in other villages, and she feels she cannot manage the job of firing by herself. Angelina Aquino, separated and living alone with small children, is another potter who sells *crudo*. A third woman told me her reason for not firing was the expense; glaze and wood are too costly, but rumor has it that the reason is a domestic one; her husband is too often drunk to be of any assistance to her.



The price for *crudo* is far below that of the finished ware. Medium sized ollas, worth \$10.00 to \$14.00 a dozen glazed and fired, bring only \$2.50 unfired. A large olla, \$3.00 *crudo*, is \$12.00 to \$15.00 finished, and medium *apaxtles* are \$2.00 per dozen as compared to \$8.00. Potters who sell in this way are very much aware of the difference. They tend to regard themselves as being exploited by the families with whom they deal, and whom they refer to as *regatones*. They point out how little they are getting for their work, and how much it brings once it is fired. Their customers, however, do not share this view and emphasize the expense rather than the profit. Chica Aguilar remarked that not a great deal is to be gained from buying *crudo*; out of the difference in price comes the cost of the glaze and wood, and the purchaser has the work of doing all the firing. Her family, like others producing the *juguetes*, buy because they want larger articles, preferably *cazuelas*, to top their ovens and protect the more delicate ware underneath.<sup>10</sup> Possibly another reason for purchasing unfired pottery is that it increases the variety of a family's stock, especially for those who make only one item, giving them a greater assortment to display when they sell in the Oaxaca plaza. The selling of finished pottery to other villagers for resale is very rare. It occurs only when some special circumstance prevents a potter from getting into the city to sell her ware, and there is no member of her family who will do it for her.

Working for wages is not unknown, but it is even less common than selling *crudo*, and seems to be the last resort of potters who have no other means of support. I found only three instances of it in the village at the time I was there. Two cases involved women in temporarily straitened circumstances, who had hired themselves out because their husbands were away—one in the States as a *bracero* and the other in jail. Both were employed in the homes of relatives, who were giving them their meals and paying them according to the number of pieces they turned out, \$1.25 for a dozen *ollas*, \$1.00 for a dozen *cazuelas*. The third was a woman whose parents were dead, and who was essentially homeless. When she was not staying with a married sister, she looked for work with any family that would take her in for a day or two and let her make *ollas* in exchange for her meals. Working *a medias*, on shares, as the men do in farming, is also apparently unusual. I know of just one occurrence. Amanda Zárate, an elderly *jarro*-maker, ordinarily works for herself, but one week she told me that she had been at the house of her married daughter, where she had made four dozen *ollas*. Her daughter's in-laws supplied the clay, did the scraping and firing, and kept two dozen, while Amanda got the remainder. These four cases seem to represent wage labor at the present time. If, as it is now, wage labor continues to be short-term arrangements between individuals, usually relatives, it is unlikely to develop into a system of production that will change pottery from a domestic to a factory industry.

## PROFITS

The income which pottery provides depends almost entirely on how much can be produced. Prices are closely related to costs and manufacturing time, so the kind of ware is largely immaterial. *Jarros* bring more than *cazuelas*, but a woman can turn out only three dozen *jarros* per day, as compared to four or five dozen of the simpler *cazuelas*. Moreover, in the long run, the method of sale makes little difference in revenue. Although families who sell to the *regatones* earn a little less each week in the dry season, they are compensated during the rains when they are less affected by the decline in demand. In the course of the year, they average approximately the same as those who sell *en puesto*. Earnings do vary, however, in direct relation to the number of individuals in the household who can devote the majority of their time to the *loza*. This, in turn, is a function of family composition, and the occupation of the men. Two or more women to share the domestic tasks, no small children to care for, and a husband who seldom works outside are the conditions for maximum productivity. Total income is certainly augmented if the men farm, but since women must now take the time to do tasks ordinarily performed by the men (preparing the clay, scraping and polishing), income from the pottery is reduced.



In addition to the amount of time, which can be given to the pottery, the speed with which an individual can work is an important factor. Those who have just learned are not as fast as potters who have been practicing their craft for many years. On the other hand, after a certain age, most women tend to slow down. At fifty or sixty, they are apt to be in poor health and cannot maintain the pace of their younger years. How these variables—family composition, occupation, length of time in the pottery, and age—affect earnings is illustrated below for a group of six families. While none of them represents a pure type, they afford a rough idea of variations in weekly income and the reasons for it. The data were collected in March, April, and early May, which can be considered normal selling months.<sup>11</sup>

Aguilar family, ten members - Felipe, age 45; wife Manuela, 43, and children: Francisca, 23; Lorenzo, 22; José, 20; María, 17; Nacho, 15; Esperanza, 13; Hermando, 6; Ofelia, 5; they make *juguets bordados*, animals and other specialties. Manuela and her two older daughters are experienced potters, and Esperanza has been working for about a year. The three adult men are farmers, but Felipe leaves most of the farming to his two sons, and Nacho often helps in the fields. Both Felipe and Lorenzo are part-time potters. Sell to the *regatones*.

First week in March--\$140

Olivera family, two members - Saul, age 30, and wife Lupe, 25 make undecorated *juguets*. This young couple has no children, and both are full-time potters. Saul has no other occupation. Sell *en puesto*.

Second week in April--\$125

López family, three members - Luico, 58; wife Rosaria, 55; Sixto Ruiz, 40, a distant relative and employee in the household make *cazuelas*. Lucio is a farmer with no time to help his wife with the pottery. However, she gets some assistance from Sixto who does the scraping and polishing and puts designs on *cazuelas*. Sell to the *regatones*.

Second week in April--\$108

Regis family, five members - This is a joint family consisting of Melchor, 67; his wife Genoveva, 58; his son Juan, 35; and Juan's wife Lupe, 24, who has a three months old baby; they make *apaxtles*, and are beginning to make specialties including *juguets*. Both women are potters, but Genoveva is often ailing and produces very little. Melchor is a full-time farmer, Juan works part of the time in the fields and is just beginning to learn pottery. Sell *en puesto*.

First week in May--\$70-\$80

López family, four members - Serafín, 30; his wife Concha, 25; two children ages 5 and 2; they make *ollas*, *cazuelas*, *cajetes*. Serafín is not a potter, but as he has no other occupation he is able to help his wife sell *en puesto*.

Fourth week in April--\$64

García family, three members - Manuela, age 40, and children: Agralia, 9, and Elvira, 6; they make *jarros* and are beginning to make *juguets*. Manuela has recently left her husband and is living with her cousins, the Aguilar. She keeps a separate household, doing her own cooking, but they help her to fire what she makes. Agralia is a beginner in pottery, and Elvira not working yet. Sell *en puesto*.

Third week in March--\$34

The figures presented above are the gross earnings of the potters. What remains, after the expenses have been paid, is just about half of this, as can be seen from an estimate of the cost of producing twelve dozen *cazuelas*. These sell at \$8.00 per dozen in the Oaxaca plaza and are a week's output for many families.

1 <i>carga</i> of San Felipe clay at \$6.00 per <i>carga</i> .....	\$6.00
<i>carga</i> of barro áspero at \$2.00 per <i>carga</i> .....	.50
6 kilos of glaze at \$4.00 per kilo .....	24.00
18 ounces of copper sulfate at \$0.30 per ounce .....	5.40
2 <i>cargas</i> of wood at \$5.00 per <i>carga</i> .....	10.00
Transport to Oaxaca: 2 baskets at \$1.00 each .....	2.00
Total .....	47.90

Assuming that a family has a glaze mill and does not have to rent one, which involves an extra peso, the earnings are \$96.00, the costs \$47.90, and the net profits \$48.10.<sup>12</sup> Profits can be slightly increased by taking the ware into Oaxaca by burro, thus saving the transportation costs, and by using the clay of Crespo, which the potters can mine themselves free of charge. Occasionally, wood can be bargained down. I have seen the Aguilars by judicious haggling get three *cargas* for \$12.50 instead of \$15.00, when dry fuel was not scarce. Costs can never be reduced by much, however, and in the rainy season they cut even more deeply into the profits, which are diminished to about a third of the gross earnings. Glaze is selling for \$4.50 a kilo, wood rises to \$6.00 or \$7.00, and double the amount is needed to fire the damp ovens. It is hardly surprising that the potters complain that little is left after the expenses. One woman said that in August, out of the \$110 she had received for two weeks work, \$83 went for expenses, another reported, that, from \$75 for one week, she had \$25 clear after she had paid for her materials. What these figures mean for families who do no farming, or who cannot produce enough on their lands to last them through till the next harvest, can be better understood when it is realized that corn in August is selling for \$3.00 an *almud*, and it takes seven *almudes* a week to make enough tortillas to feed four adults.

In the opinion of most of the potters, the craft does not provide them with a good living at any season of the year. Only one of my informants, Soledad Juárez, who produces the big ollas, felt that she was getting an adequate return for her work, remarking that "*Este oficio da dinero--this oficio brings in the money.*" Soledad, however, is not trying to support her family on what she makes, since her husband is a farmer with several plots of land and his own oxen. The more general view is that, ordinarily, one can barely earn enough to live and, even under the best of conditions, it is not an occupation in which one can accumulate substantial savings and become wealthy. My own observations tend to confirm this supposition. The few families who could be classified as rich by village standards are either full-time farmers with extensive lands, or specialists in other trades--storekeepers or butchers, while the well-to-do potters all have some other source of income.

The potters are not inclined to hold each other responsible for their financial straits, probably because they are not often in direct competition. A large percentage of families are producing different items, and during most of the year no one has difficulty finding a ready market. If they blame anyone for the low profits, it is apt to be the *regatones*. The term itself has negative connotations; *regatón* means "haggler," "one who beats down the price." Its use, in preference to the more neutral *rescatón* or *comerciante*, suggests something of the potters' attitude.<sup>13</sup> Most feel the merchants' markup is too high, and sentiments similar to that expressed by one of the women, "They profit from our work," are not uncommon. For some families, resentment towards the Oaxaca *regatones* is mitigated by ties of friendship and *compadrazgo*, and, perhaps, by the fact that the merchants are city people and somewhat superior in social and economic status. When these factors are absent, as they are apt to be in commercial relations with villagers of other communities, hostility is more openly expressed. It sometimes takes the form of accusations of witchcraft and is particularly marked toward the inhabitants of San Felipe, who are

suppliers as well as customers. Excessive bargaining with these villagers is dangerous as, if they are dissatisfied with an economic transaction, they will return at night as witches to take revenge.

Looked at objectively, no one can be blamed for the fact that pottery is not a remunerative occupation, since this is the result of the interdependence of the craft with other aspects of the regional economy. The majority of consumers are, like the Atzompeños, farmers and artisans in rural areas with a slightly better than subsistence income; some, like the Mixtecs in the northern and western part of the state, are a good deal poorer. They could not, therefore, afford to pay higher prices for the pottery. The middlemen, who play an important role in marketing and distribution, do not appear to be getting rich at the expense of the potters. Their profits are not unreasonable, and the *regatones* of Oaxaca belong to the lower strata of the urban population, with a standard of living not much above that of the villages. Finally, costs could not be materially reduced without depriving other communities, San Felipe and San Lorenzo, of one of their principal means of support.

Within the framework of this economy, the potters operate with what appears to be maximum efficiency. They have geared their manufacturing processes to quantity production. Although they could probably turn out a greater number of pots by adopting such techniques as the wheel and the use of press molds, it is doubtful if they could sell them, since the market for the *corriente* ware is not an expanding one. Economic considerations largely determine which types of pottery they produce. Potters who work on order adjust their production to the requests of the *regatones*. The others respond to seasonal fluctuations in demand, making, within the limits of their *oficio*, what customers seem most likely to buy. Several women have gone so far as to change their *oficios*, taking up ones which they believe will be more profitable. One woman switched from *cazuelas* to *ollas* because her husband decided the latter were in more demand; another, who had in her youth rejected the big *apaxtles*, her mother's *oficio*, has recently started making them because they always sell well. If, as seems quite probable, the next few years see the growth of Oaxaca as a tourist center, there will be an expanded local market for the fine pottery. One can then expect a corresponding increase in the supply, as more families devote themselves to making this kind of ware.

At present, there is little the potters can do about their economic situation. If their income is lower than that of potters in other regions, such as those of Tzintzuntzan, it is a reflection of a regional economy which is underdeveloped. Despite the relatively small returns, pottery occupies a central position in Atzompa's economy. For the village as a whole it provides additional earnings, which supplement farming income and make crop failure and other agricultural losses less disastrous. For one third of the population, those families who have no lands and do little or no farming, pottery provides the sole means of support.

#### Notes to Chapter 5

1. The figures for my sample of 59 families are as follows: *en puesto* 63 per cent; delivery to the *regatones* 24 per cent; regularly both, 2 per cent. The remaining 11 per cent showed no clear pattern.
2. One of my informants had a different reason for selling to *regatones*. "It's because they rob me *en puesto*. So many people crowd around that I can't keep track of who's buying what and somebody always walks off with a couple of my *cazuelas*".
3. Atzompa now operates almost completely on a money economy, and barter is not as common as it apparently once was. Fifteen to twenty years ago, according to de la Fuente and Malinowski, barter was used in the village for nearly all market transactions. Unpublished manuscript quoted in Whetten, 1948, p. 358.

4. All prices are given in the value of the peso. There are one hundred centavos to the peso, and the latter at the present time is worth eight cents in American money. Therefore, forty centavos (written \$0.40) are worth a little more than three cents.
5. Fortunately, most people considered me a disinterested questioner; although during my first months in the village, some of the answers I received on price were quite obviously prejudiced by the expectation that I was going to buy in quantity.
6. On the other hand, potters will raise their prices for unwary American tourists. The Torres' large red animals, usually priced at \$5.00, are \$8.00 "when tourists come."
7. Throughout Mexico, except in retail stores, sellers do not expect to get their original asking price, which they set higher than the commodity is worth. Buyers do not expect to pay it, and they counter with a figure that is less the amount than they are prepared to give.
8. As previously mentioned, Oaxaca city and Coyotepec, the other pottery producing centers in the valley, do not make the same kind of articles as does Atzompa.
9. Foster gives this explanation for the seasonal decrease in demand in Tzintzuntzan in Western Mexico. Foster, 1948, p. 101.
10. Occasionally, members of this family will buy large articles, such as *floreros* which they decorate with *bordado* designs before firing them.
11. For three cases, the figures on the weekly income were volunteered by my informants. For one I asked for the information, and for the remaining two I estimated earnings from data on how many pots the families had produced, the price they sold for, and the cost of producing them. Price and income are not touchy topics in Atzompa, and since my informants questioned me freely about them, I felt free to do the same. However, the potters keep no accounts, and the average person would not know, for example, how much was earned in a year, nor what per cent of the income had been derived from pottery as compared to farming.
12. This represents a weekly income of about four dollars American money for the family and is 25 per cent less than the amount Foster estimated one potter could earn in a week in Tzintzuntzan by doing all the work himself. The difference, I believe, is due to the somewhat better economic conditions prevailing in western Mexico as compared to those of the southern states.
13. *Regatón* comes from *regatear* meaning to haggle, to beat down; *rescatón* from *rescatar* to exchange, to barter; *comerciante* simply means merchant.

## CHAPTER VI

### LEARNING AND MOTIVATION

#### THE TRANSMISSION OF POTTERY SKILLS

Pottery making is learned at an early age, most women acquiring their skills in childhood. Normally, a girl is taught by her mother or, if her mother is dead, by the female relative who has raised her—a stepmother, an aunt, a grandmother, an older sister. A few make their first attempts very young, at the age of seven or eight. The majority, however, begin around ten, unless they are in school, in which case they are taken out to start at twelve. Those who delay beyond the age of twelve are either attending school longer than the one or two years usually considered sufficient for girls, or they are occupied with the care of younger siblings, with little chance to work steadily at pottery. Due to schooling and domestic duties, children in the same family sometimes learn at different ages. The eldest daughter may have started at a somewhat later age than her younger sisters, because she was responsible for looking after them. On the other hand, she may have begun younger, since, if one daughter is already producing and contributing to the family income, the others are allowed a longer period in school. There is also variation between families. Some parents feel that regardless of the amount of education a girl receives, she should not begin to work before the age of twelve; contact with the cold clay is thought harmful for a young child, and apt to bring on lung sickness.

Women who are born outside Atzompa, in one of the neighboring *ranchos* or villages, or whose mothers were born elsewhere and did not work pottery, learn at the time of marriage from their mothers-in-law. Because girls often marry in their early teens, many outsiders begin *loza* only a few years later than native Atzompeños. The average age is seventeen and, if a woman is going to learn at all, rarely is she over twenty. The men who take up pottery start later than the women. In a sample of 124 potters, 98 per cent of the women whose parents made pottery learned as children. Thirty-three per cent of the men did not learn until after they were married, although they grew up in pottery producing households. Three of these men were taught by their fathers, two by their wives, and two, who live in their wives' family, were taught by their fathers-in-law. The remaining 66 per cent learned in childhood, from their mothers or from their fathers if they were potters, but all at an older age than the women.

The difference between the sexes in regard to the age at which pottery is learned is due in part to the longer period which a boy spends in school, and to the fact that boys whose families are farmers are expected to help in the fields. A boy's activities, therefore, keep him away from home far more than do a girl's, and he is not as likely as she is to be able to combine pottery making with other domestic tasks. Another element is the general opinion in Atzompa that pottery is not properly a male occupation. It is not assumed that boys, like girls, will eventually practice the craft, so in most families there is little or no pressure on them to learn as children. In the village today only one boy below the age of eighteen is a potter and, although in several other households there is vague talk of the sons beginning to learn when they are through school, *loza* is regarded less as a promising career for a young man than as an alternative, if nothing better is in the offing.

Children almost invariably learn their parents' *oficio* and, in the case of the men, the majority continue to make the kind of pottery they were taught at home. A woman, however, usually changes at marriage, either taking up her mother-in-law's *oficio* in addition to that of her own, or more often discarding her craft completely in favor of the type of ware made by her husband's family. Although this pattern appears to be the standard one, some potters, when they are questioned, will give a practical



reason for it. Rosa Ruiz claims she switched from *cazuelas* to *comales* when she married because *comales* are easier and cheaper to produce. Augustina Osorio did just the opposite, her reason being that *comales* are too delicate and there is less breakage with *cazuelas*. Other women state simply that they changed because "one learns the *oficio* of the house." Since most girls marry young, the shift does not involve the kind of readjustment it would for an adult woman who had become accustomed to a particular type of ware. Many potters speak of knowing only a little when they married; others say that they were able to turn out small versions of what their parents produced but "ugly, poorly made."

Because most women change *oficios* at marriage, pottery, although essentially a female occupation, tends to be transmitted in the male line. Yet not all women take up craft of their mothers-in-law. Out of 40 cases in which both parents and in-laws are potters, 11 women have continued to make only the articles they learned as children. Four of these cases can be accounted for by matrilocal residence, which lessens the bride's contact with her mother-in-law, and hence her opportunity, and her obligation, to learn from her. In two other cases, the girls came from families specializing in *juguetes*, which the groom's relatives were anxious to learn. A seventh did take over the kind of pottery made by her in-laws, which again happened to be *juguetes*, but later switched back to her own craft, *jarros*, because she found the miniature pots "too much bother." I do not know, in the four remaining cases, what circumstances caused them to be exceptions to the rule. In at least one, the woman married late, which may have been the determinant. In another, the girl's mother-in-law produces the big *apaxtles*, the *oficio* regarded with disfavor and sometimes rejected by the younger potters, although there are daughters-in-law who have dutifully learned it. Generation does not seem to be a factor, since five of the women who have not changed are in their late forties or above, while many of those who have changed are in their early twenties or late teens. One cannot assume, therefore, that these eleven cases represent an alteration or a breakdown of the traditional pattern.

In principle, pottery is learned only from relatives, either consanguinal or affinal. The few women who have not followed their mothers' craft before marriage--the daughters of Juliana Torres who refused to learn big *apaxtles*, and several other girls who preferred another type of *loza* to that produced at home--have all acquired their alternative *oficios* from a near relation, usually an aunt. Learning from non-relatives, however, has occurred. Two of the women who were born outside of Atzompa gained their knowledge of pottery from a neighbor, one as a child shortly after her parents came to the village, the other as an adult. A third, who moved in from one of the *ranchos* was taught *apaxtles* by a *comadre*, and a fourth, a native Atzompeña, was orphaned at an early age and learned *jarros* from the woman of the house where she was employed as a maid. In none of these instances was any money exchanged. Paying to learn pottery is quite unknown, perhaps because it is so rarely necessary for an individual who wants to learn to go beyond the circle of the immediate family.

It is generally recognized that pottery is a skill which requires some sort of guidance or instruction from another person. Of the 124 potters who were asked who had taught them, only five replied, "No one." All of the others named a specific individual. At the same time, the role of the teacher is minimized, and learning is seen as consisting primarily of watching how an experienced potter works and trying to imitate her. One girl, who said that she had learned from her mother, went on to qualify her statement, explaining, "We aren't really taught *loza* by anyone, because we see it being done all around us from the time we are little." Similar remarks from others indicate the importance of observation. "One notices how it is done." "I saw how my mother did it and began to work." "I learned by watching."

For those who start as children, learning is much as the potters describe it, highly informal, since children can absorb the essentials of the craft in the same way that they acquire competence in other facets of life. At the age of five or six, girls begin to take an interest in pottery making, incorporating it into their games. With a heap of stones and a few wisps of straw, they will go through the motions of glazing, stacking, firing, and unpacking the kiln, identifying the various steps as they manipulate their toys. At

the Aguilers, the five-year-old Mema, playing with broken *juguetes*, would roll one on her finger, as she had seen her elders do, saying, "Look, I'm working." The clay itself, with its plastic qualities, can be an intriguing plaything. In one household I came across a child of six trying to make an *olla* like her mother's. She was happily engaged in smearing clay onto a molde and rolling out lumpy strips, which she asserted were to be the walls of her pot.

Left to themselves, most children would probably not progress far beyond the stage of playing at pottery, as they soon become bored or discouraged over the failure of their initial efforts. But they are not left to themselves, and at eight or nine they are given their first serious job, that of helping to scrape and polish the ware. This is considered suitable work for children, and even young boys are required to take part in it. By the time a girl is started on the work of forming pots, she is already able to turn out small tortillas. There are enough parallels between the motor patterns of these two activities to make the acquisition of one easier once the other has been mastered. For both, the hands must be kept clean and damp so that the material, the dough or the clay, does not stick to them, but they should not be so wet that it becomes slimy and unmanageable. In patting out tortillas, the principal problem is that of maintaining an even thickness, just as it is in building up a pot, while splitting or breaking apart is the common hazard. When a girl has attained some facility in handling the tortilla dough, she is better prepared for the more complicated patterns involved in pottery making.

One always starts, as the potters phrase it, "small and low." Children first learn to make tiny *apaxtles* or *cazuelas* and, if they are from a family which specializes in these articles, their progress will consist mainly of working up to the larger sizes. Their early products are apt to be lopsided and uneven, and it is usually two or three months before they can manufacture anything that is judged fit to be sold. For economic reasons, as well as to demonstrate the proper way to do it, an adult will frequently rework a beginner's pots, correcting some of the defects. If the *oficio* to be learned is *ollas* or *jarros*, a child still starts with *apaxtles* or *cazuelas*, and only when one of these articles has been mastered is she qualified to attempt the more difficult process of shaping up a *barrilito* (high, straight walled form), and rounding it out to produce an *olla*, or the bowl part of a *jarro*. The last step is learning how to spin up the collar or neck with the wet leather. Some parents keep their children two or three years on the easier types of pottery, before letting them go on to *ollas* and *jarros*.

Children differ in the speed with which they acquire the basic techniques of the craft. Some keep at pottery steadily and, within a few months after they have begun, are averaging two or three dozen *juguete*-sized pots a day. Others work in fits and starts, practicing assiduously for a day or two and then not touching the clay for as long as a week. To a certain extent this is recognized as natural--"It is the way of children." If this kind of behavior persists, however, and a child will not or cannot seem to learn, coercion is applied in the form of teasing, shaming, and occasionally beating. In extreme cases a girl's hands are rubbed with *chichicastli*, the leaves of a bitter plant which, according to those who have experienced it, burns like fire. The notion that it is the hands that must be punished extends to other situations. A reluctant tortilla maker is warned that her palms will be placed on the hot *comal*.

In the Aguilar household, I had a chance to observe some of the aspects of the learning situation at close range, since there were three children who were working at pottery. None, strictly speaking, was a beginner, but neither were they regarded as full-fledged potters. Isiaes, son of the widowed Tío Tomás, was eleven years old and had been making *juguetes* for about a year and a half. He had been taught by his aunts, and was the one boy of that age in the village who had taken up the craft. Although he was in school and had other tasks to perform, such as fetching water and looking after the animals, he kept at pottery with remarkable perseverance, always putting in an hour in the early morning and several more late in the afternoon. I think the economic situation had something to do with his diligence; without his help, his father would have found it hard to carry on alone. They worked together, Isiaes doing the forming and Tomás putting on the handles and the *bordado* designs. While I was there, the boy began to

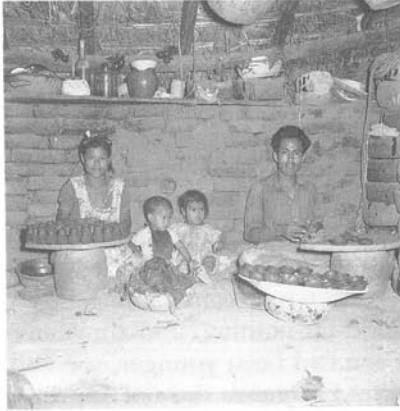
learn to decorate, and his cousin Chica was showing him how to make larger *juguetes*. Her instructions consisted of demonstrating the amount of clay needed to start the pot, and then going through the process of shaping it while he watched her. He was considered apt (*listo*) at pottery and a good worker, principally because of his rate of production. Various members of the family would point out to me that he could make four to five dozen *juguetes* a day when he was in school and as much as a gross when he was not.

In many ways, thirteen-year-old Esperanza was the opposite of Isiaes. She, too, had spent about eighteen months in pottery making, having started after two years of schooling. Her *juguetes* were smaller than those of her sisters, Chica and María, and, although they appeared well-made to me, they were pronounced inferior in quality by the older girls "because they are not like ours." It was in respect to quantity, however, that she was most sharply criticized, her production amounting to five or six dozen *juguetes* a week, which was thought shockingly little. Her *molde* was set up near that of her mother, who kept an eye on her and was constantly after her to get down to work--complaining that she had not produced a single *juguete* all morning, calling her a lazy good-for-nothing, and threatening her with *chichicastli*. Her sisters often chimed in, asserting that when she had been younger, she had done well, but that now she was a poor worker and did not want to learn. Esperanza did not appear to be greatly affected by the tirades of her relatives, and continued to work sporadically. When she was allowed to begin making decorated *juguetes*, she was able, almost from the first, to turn out fruit and flower motifs which closely resembled those of the rest of the family, but she found it less trouble to ornament her pots with a simple dot design. Her mother would discover these when she was checking over her daughter's work before it was to be fired, and would hold them up in disgust, proclaiming them a disgrace.

That Esperanza's poor performance was due to lack of motivation, rather than ability, became evident when María married and left the household. The younger girl quickly slipped into the role of her older sister, taking on the responsibilities of an adult as she acquired some of its prerogatives. She was ordered around less, was not, as before, the one who was invariably sent on errands or called to mind the children, and she was more frequently chosen to accompany her parents when they went into Oaxaca. At the same time, she began to pull her weight in pottery making. She moved into María's working space in the back room with Chica and, although no longer under the direct supervision of her mother, she gave up the "disgraceful" dot design and increased her production to the point where it began to satisfy even the exacting standards of the older women of the family.

The youngest of the three children working in the household was Agralia, daughter of Manuela García, the cousin of Felipe, who had left her husband and taken temporary refuge at the Aguilers. Although only nine, Agralia had been working in pottery almost a year, since economic necessity had forced her mother to start her earlier than usual. She had been learning Manuela's *oficio*, *jarros*, but upon coming to live with her cousins, she switched to *juguetes*, making them in *jarro* form. Her pots were as yet crude and misshapen, but her mother seemed proud of her progress, claiming that each week showed some improvement. The child herself was very earnest about learning. Every evening she would tell me how many *juguetes* she had made that day, comparing her output with that of Isiaes and Esperanza, and how many she planned to make tomorrow. She said she was glad to be learning, because then she would have a profession and a means of earning a living as a grown woman, and she hoped to be taught the *bordado* designs if they stayed at the Aguilers. She was critical of her own work, calling it ugly and, unlike Esperanza, she was quite sensitive to the criticism of others. On several occasions she was reduced to tears by my *comadre* or by Tía Lina who had commented disparagingly on her pots, remarking that they were uneven and would break the first time they were used. When, after three months, Agralia and her mother moved out, her *juguetes* had increased about one inch in size and were somewhat more symmetrical.

## 22. Learning



Children grow up with it--



Play with it--



Watch it being made--



Imitate their mothers--



And try it themselves



Then they begin to produce



The reactions of pupils and teachers, as I saw them at the Aguilers, seem fairly typical. Some children are slower or less willing than others, but all girls know that they will eventually have to learn the craft and few openly rebel against it. The financial position of the parents probably has some effect on how soon they settle down to steady work, but it is also a matter of how long they have been at it. Those who are just beginning are usually eager. They are proud of their own handiwork, glad to display it to strangers, and always respond "Si" when asked if they enjoy learning. I believe, however, that Esperanza's case is not uncommon, and that normally a good deal of pressure has to be applied when the initial enthusiasm has worn off, and pottery can no longer be looked upon as a game to be taken up or put aside as one pleases. Parents, too, differ in the manner in which they handle the situation. Some praise their offsprings' efforts while others are less encouraging. In general, approval is meted out less generously than exhortation and criticism, and for all, the most important criterion of achievement is production. By fourteen, every girl is expected to have mastered the *oficio* of her family, and to be turning out articles in quantity. Although her work continues to be judged "too heavy" by her elders, it is recognized that this is a defect that will be corrected by time. The exceptions are girls whose mothers specialize in the big *apaxtles* or big *ollas*. These items are never made by children, since the huge *molde*, and the amount of clay which goes into the *apaxtles*, make them too laborious for anyone under the age of sixteen, and big *ollas* require a skill that is only attained after years of practice. Girls destined for these *oficios*, therefore, delay longer than others and may go on making the medium sizes until they are in their late teens or twenties.

For individuals who do not grow up with the pottery but start after marriage, the learning situation is scarcely more structured than it is for children. The only detailed data I have on adults as pupils come from my own experience. When I moved in with the Aguilers it was with the understanding that I would try to learn pottery making, and in my first month with them, I spent many hours sitting with Chica and María, watching them work. During these periods, they would urge me to attempt a *juguete* and hand me a small dab of clay which I would struggle to shape into a pot. There was much laughter at my failures but no definite instructions other than "See how we do it," and assertions that it was easy. On the one or two occasions when I managed to produce something which might loosely be called a *juguete*, it was taken from me, reshaped, and then pronounced adequate to be fired and sold. The same thing happened when I experimented with decorating. There were no criticisms of my first effort, beyond the comment that my leaves and flowers would probably fall off in the firing, and one of the girls went over them, pressing in the pellets and sharpening some of the forms with a spine. On my second attempt, I was told that the design required another leaf, which was added by Chica, and brought my motif more into conformity with hers. At this session, I ornamented three pots in about an hour with everyone repeatedly inquiring if I hadn't finished with "that one" yet, and my *comadre* remarking that I ought to have done three dozen instead of three in that span of time. On another occasion I tried to make a lid for a water jug while various members of the family entertained themselves by looking on. María kept warning me not to get the piece too wet or it would break, and several times she took it from my hands to dry it off. When I was through, my *comadre* examined it carefully, smoothing some of the rough edges and making sure the handle was on tight.

Certainly my position was atypical, and much of the Aguilers' behavior toward me as a beginner, such as their amusement, their curiosity, and their lack of personal involvement in my progress, was due to the fact that I was a foreigner and a temporary member of the household. Two factors, however, can be considered constants. One is the infrequency of verbal instructions, the other the practice of reworking what the novice has produced. The first was particularly noticeable one afternoon when Juan Regis, the Aguilers' son-in-law who was learning *juguetes*, came over to the house to work. He had set up his *molde* in the kitchen shed, where a rather large group had gathered, and he was quite obviously having a hard time. When he came to round out his *juguete*, he either split the edges at the top or broke through the bottom. By dint of mending, or starting over, he finally completed one, although during the fifteen minutes he had been laboring over it, none of the five experienced potters who were present had given



him a word of advice. The few chances I had to observe beginners in other households led me to the conclusion that non-interference is the rule. At the Zárates the new daughter-in-law asks if the *cazuelas* she is making are all right and is told simply to go on and make more. María García, teaching *ollas* to her sixteen-year-old niece, Anna, tells her the same thing, adding, "We will fix them up later." When the girl has formed four or five, María sits down and proceeds to straighten out the lopsided pots, while Anna stands by to see how she does it. For adults as well as for children, the pattern of learning is one of watching another person work, trying it oneself, and watching again while one's mistakes are being corrected.

#### SOME OPINIONS ABOUT LEARNING AND ABILITY

Although some data on attitudes were picked up at the Aguilars and through casual conversations with other families, more extensive information was obtained by the use of a short list of questions designed to elicit opinions about learning and ability to make pottery. These were administered, informally but standardized as to wording, to one or more individuals in a sample of 59 pottery producing households, giving an N of 66. On some questions the "no answers" run as high as 13 per cent, but they can be assumed to be randomly distributed, as they simply mean that I forgot to ask the question or, as often happened, someone other than the person I thought I was interviewing, answered it.

Two questions have to do with learning--how long does it take, and, is it easy or hard.<sup>1</sup> Responses to the first question varied widely, some people maintaining that *loza* can be mastered in a week, others that it requires a minimum of four to five years. One year was the period most frequently mentioned and the majority of the answers, 67 per cent, fell within a range of a couple of months to a year. On the second question, "Is it easy or hard to learn?" informants were almost evenly divided. Fifty-nine per cent said that it is comparatively easy, 41 per cent that it is hard, or hard at first.

Opinion on these topics cannot be accounted for by age, place of birth, whether the individual learned pottery as a child or an adult, or the length of time he or she has been making pottery. That sex may have some effect on the estimates of learning time is suggested by the fact that a larger proportion of men named a short period (a week to a few months), while slightly more women viewed it as a matter of several years. However, a breakdown by participation in pottery making (see Table VI-1 below) reveals that the difference actually lies between the potters, regardless of their sex, and non-potters. The latter, all of whom are men who help their wives but have never learned the craft, believe that a year or less is sufficient, whereas the male potters, even more than the women, tend to feel that three to five years are necessary. Neither sex nor participation affect appraisals of the difficulty of learning. Here, men and women, potters and non-potters, are equally likely to have the same viewpoint.

The principal determinant of responses to both questions is *oficio*, either the kind of pottery made by the individual or, for the non-potters, the kind made in the household. As shown in Tables VI-2 and 3, potters whose experience has been with relatively simple items--small *apaxtles*, *cazuelas*, or *comales*--feel that skill can be acquired quickly and easily, while the learning period is judged longer and harder by those who produce the more complex or laborious types of ware. Almost without exception, women whose *oficio* is big *apaxtles* or big *ollas* said that it was hard to learn, and several claimed that *loza* is not really mastered until some years after marriage.

TABLE VI-1

Opinions on Time Required to Learn Pottery  
According to Participation and Sex of Potters

	Female Potters	Male Potters	Male Non-potters
	%	%	%
Few weeks to a few months	26	33	44
Six months to a year	46	23	56
Two to five years	28	44	0
(Number of cases) <sup>2</sup>	(39)	(9)	(9)

TABLE VI-2

Opinions on Time Required to Learn Pottery  
According to Type of Pottery Made by Individual<sup>3</sup>

	<i>Apaxtles, cazuelas or comales</i> %	<i>Ollas and/or jarros</i> %	Specialties %	Big <i>Apaxtles</i> or big <i>ollas</i> %	Nothing %
Few weeks to a few months	56	3	8	17	44
Six months to a year	33	45	54	17	56
Two to five years	11	25	38	66	0
(Number of cases)	(9)	(20)	(13)	(6)	(9)

TABLE VI-3

Opinions on Difficulty of Learning Pottery  
According to Type of Pottery Made by Individual

	Apaxtles <i>cazuelas</i> or <i>comales</i> %	Ollas and/or <i>jarros</i> %	Special- ties %	Big <i>apaxtles</i> or big <i>ollas</i> %	Nothing %
Easy to learn	88	76	50	12	55
Hard to learn	12	24	50	88	45
(Number of cases)	(8)	(17)	(12)	(8)	(9)

In giving their responses, many informants made qualifications--"It is easy if ...," which brought out the factors generally regarded as influencing the speed and ease with which learning occurs. Some said that practice is essential, usually linking it to manual dexterity. "When the hand becomes accustomed to the clay, learning is easy." "It is hard at first because the hand does not know how." "It is a matter of practice and of the fingers becoming loose or apt (*suelos*)." Two women compared pottery to writing, pointing out that for both the hand must be trained to do its work. The notion that capacity is in the hands was a frequent theme at the Aguilar where I was told, "Your hands do not understand," when I failed at making tortillas and *juguetes*. Other people, too, informed me that my hands must lose their fear or my difficulties would never be overcome. "You work with fear, don't you? Your hands must rid themselves of that."

Another important element mentioned by many of the respondents is intelligence. Sometimes the word itself was used, but more often it was put in terms of having a good memory or a "soft head," since in Atzompa the soft-headed person is smart and the hard-headed stupid. "It all depends on the memory one has; those with no memory delay a long time." "When one has a hard head (*cabeza dura*), it takes three or four years to learn, but when one is bright (*listo*), only one." Finally, motivation is considered crucial, affecting more than anything else the beginner's proficiency in the craft. The rapid learner is enthusiastic, takes pleasure in the work, and has a love for the clay; without enjoyment, learning is slow and performance poor. There is no one, it is believed, who is unable to learn if she (or he) really wants to.

From the foregoing comments, it is evident that some people are thought to have more aptitude for learning than others. To obtain more data on the subject of individual differences, and to discover if distinctions were made between full-fledged potters, I used the questions, "Are there differences in ability to make the pottery?" and "Who has more facility for the pottery, men or women?" Only 11 per cent (six out of 57 respondents) replied that all potters are equally capable, that once having learned one person does as well as another.<sup>4</sup> The rest (89 per cent) replied that there are marked differences; some people's pots are better than others. Several informants attributed the disparity to the number of years the craft has been practiced--those with more time in *loza* are more skillful, and several others declared that it is the result of the way the clay is manipulated--"Some make pottery poorly because they have a stiff hand." Two felt that it is a matter of the consistency of the clay and that better ware is

produced if the *barro áspero* has been well sifted through a fine screen. The majority, however, said that ability depends on intelligence or on taste for the work (*afición*). Sometimes, both of these factors were mentioned, sometimes just one, but there seems to be little doubt that the best potters, like the best learners, are considered to be those who can "think with their heads" and who enjoy what they are doing.<sup>5</sup>

On the question of differences in ability between the sexes, there was almost unanimous agreement. Only four out of 61 people said that men have as much facility for the pottery as women, and none claimed they have more. The deviants, as might be expected, were three male potters and one woman whose husband makes the ware. The usual view is that men do not understand the pottery. They can scrape and polish and incise designs, but they do not know how to form and, some informants added, they do not want to learn. One woman making a statement to this effect became quite vehement. "Men are very lazy. They won't learn and they don't even want to go and get the clay or do the scraping and polishing. They expect the women to do all the work." Few reasons were offered for masculine ineptitude in the craft. One man, himself a potter, said that women are just more adept (*mas viva*), when it comes to the *loza*, another that men are dedicated to the fields, which is why they have no talent for an occupation carried out in the house. Most take it simply as a natural fact. Pottery is the *oficio* of the woman, and it follows, therefore, that it is she who has the ability.

Rather surprisingly, it is assumed that women who come from the surrounding *ranchos* and villages and learn pottery at marriage are better potters than those who are born in Atzompa and begin as children. Since I had not anticipated a distinction along these lines, I had not included a question on it, but after several informants had remarked that outsiders have more ability, I began inquiring about it on subsequent interviews. It proved to be a controversial topic, often engendering discussion or arguments between members of the same family, but the results were very much in favor of outsiders. Of 35 people questioned, seven asserted either that there are no differences between Atzompeños and outsiders or that the former have more talent and that, if those born outside of the village are able to learn at all, they master only simpler items like small *apaxtles* and *cazuelas*. Individuals holding this view tend to be older, producers of the common rather than the fine pottery, and with no one in their immediate family circle who was born out of the village. The remaining 28, and eight others who volunteered their opinion, were convinced that outsiders are better, principally because they take a greater interest in the pottery and have more inclination to learn it. A few other reasons were given: differences in intelligence--"They are smarter than we are"; age--"They arrive already grown up, so they start with more knowledge and pay more attention when they are being shown how it is done." Several informants were frankly baffled by the phenomenon--"God knows why, but their things come out prettier." Most explanations were based, in one form or another, on motivation even when love, taste, or enthusiasm were not actually mentioned. People from the *ranchos* and other towns want to learn, they see the necessity for it, and they want to earn money. Most important, they are not tired of the pottery "as we are." This was a sentiment which was often expressed, and was usually coupled with that of being vexed or annoyed with the *loza*. "We grow up with this *oficio*, we live with it from the time we are little, so we are more apt to get annoyed with it."

Because of touchy interpersonal relationships in the village, and the bad feeling that exists between many families, I did not feel it would be wise to ask my informants to rate each other on ability. As it was, one woman was embarrassed over the question about differences, implying it was hardly proper for her to judge whether one potter was better than another. Some, however, voluntarily referred to particular individuals or households to illustrate their statements concerning learning and talent. Sometimes it was a relative or a neighbor "who makes pretty *ollas*" or "whose *apaxtles* are well made," but more often one of four names was mentioned--the Aguilars, Teodora Blanco, Juana Velasco, or Rosaria Cañada, all of whom specialize in *loza fina*. Juana and Rosaria were commended for their delicate, decorated *cazuelas*, Teodora for her musical animals and other *curiositas* (curious or rare pots), and the

Aguilars for their *juguetes* "very finely made with designs of various kinds." It was also pointed out that the Aguilars have an enthusiasm for making different forms, and that everything is done "purely by hand." A few informants used themselves as examples, usually deprecating their own work in comparison to that of others. Rosaria contrasted herself with Juana Velasco, saying that they both produced fine *cazuelas*, but the latter "won over her", because she could make other types of ware as well as Juana. Another woman called her own pottery *corriente*, "It's nothing fine at all," and a third said that although her parents had been expert potters, she herself was "hard headed" and unable to learn to make the things they had turned out. Interestingly enough, several of the women born outside were among those who judged themselves less competent than the average, asserting that they had experienced great difficulty in learning and had never gotten beyond the stage of small *apaxtles*.

At the Aguilars, there was some comment about the ability of various members of the family, as well as about that of potters in other households. The work of Grandfather Aguilar, Felipe's father, was often spoken of, and praised, for its variety and fine designs. None of the present generation, I was told, is the master potter that he was, although Tía Lina comes the closest to meeting his standards. Her sister, Tía Tina, the oldest member of the family, is considered the least talented. She was not skillful in her youth, and was frequently chastised by her father because she could not learn to make *bordado* designs. Felipe is regarded as a good worker because he is fast, and Lorenzo is very nimble (*muy ligero*). Remarks about other families were usually negative in character. The *juguetes* of their cousins were pronounced too wide at the mouth (*bocón*), those of another family rough on the inside (*raspando*), which comes from working with dirty hands. The *jarros* of another relative were judged "poor work; there are others who do better." To some extent these judgments may have been colored by the Aguilars' relationship to the individuals in question, although they admire the work of Rosaria Cañada, with whom they are not on particularly good terms, and that of a distant relative by marriage, of whom they greatly disapprove.

While it is clear that Atzompeños have fairly definite opinions about learning, individual differences in ability, and the reasons for these differences, it is less clear how they define ability, or what they mean by "better" pottery. The distinction most frequently made is that between *fino* and *corriente*, those who produce decorated pottery and the specialties being regarded as more talented than those who make utilitarian ware. Associated with decoration is diversity, the capacity to turn out a variety of forms rather than just one. It is these two characteristics which appear to set apart the exceptional from the merely competent craftsmen. Yet it should not be assumed that there is any ranking of potters which is generally accepted by all of them, or that the individuals who were named as best by some of the villagers enjoy prestige which carries over into other aspects of life. Pottery making is not the topic which most interests the average villager, and I do not believe that comparisons or contrasts in terms of skill are usually made, unless they are specifically asked for. The attributes considered essential for the craft are speed, and the mastery of the techniques required by whatever *oficio* one happens to inherit by birth or by marriage. Most people are content when they achieve these, and judge as "good" any potter who has done so.

The prevalence of the notion that outsiders are better potters than natives has, in my opinion, little objective basis, since the former seem to exhibit the same range in ability as do the Atzompeños. Some, who have married into households producing the *loza fina* and the specialties, have mastered these articles and become as expert as the rest of the family in making them, whereas others appear less capable than the average. Since women from other communities are a few years older than the majority of the villagers when they start pottery making, they may learn somewhat more rapidly, causing them to be regarded as prodigies. Also, they may, in fact learn with greater willingness and express more enthusiasm about the craft in an effort to conform to the norms of the group of which they have become a part. A young bride would be anxious to prove herself to her new in-laws and show them that she has ability in an area in which women are expected to be proficient.



## MOTIVATION

There is little point in asking what motivates women to take up pottery, since a girl born into a pottery-producing family has almost no choice. Her parents may weigh the advisability of sending her to school, but whether she goes or not, it is taken for granted that she will follow her mother's *oficio*. It is scarcely more a matter of decision for a woman who comes from another community and marries into a family practicing the craft. The *loza* is regarded as a part of her regular domestic duties, and everyone expects that, as a member of the household, she will learn as quickly as possible.

Few Atzompeños recognize that there is any other career open to a girl. One man told me that he would like to see his granddaughter finish school in the village and go on to Oaxaca city, where she could study to prepare for some other occupation, perhaps teaching. At the present time, however, this kind of ambition for one's children, even for boys, is rare, and the means of fulfilling it still rarer. A second possibility is domestic service in the city; while it is occasionally considered, it is not viewed as particularly desirable. Parents are loath to send their daughters away from home at an early age, and by the time they are judged old enough to go, they are already producing potters and financial assets to their families.

The children themselves seldom question the necessity of learning pottery, although they may be initially reluctant or slow to settle down to it. I know of only one case in which a girl has rebelled, a thirteen-year-old whose mother is separated from her husband. The girl was raised in Oaxaca by relatives, has recently returned to the village to live with her mother, and is thoroughly discontented with the arrangement. She hates everything about Atzompa, finds her home poor and dirty, and refuses to touch the clay, a distaste which her mother attributes to the fact that in Oaxaca she got accustomed to being "clean and well regulated." Since without her husband's authority the mother can do nothing with the girl, she feels she will eventually have to accede to her daughter's wishes and send her back to her relatives in the city.

Once having learned pottery making, the overwhelming majority of women continue to practice it, primarily for economic reasons. For a woman who wants or needs to earn money, the restricted village economy offers almost no alternatives. A store requires capital, while laundering or tortilla making are services for which there is a limited demand. These services are utilized only by potters who find themselves too busy to do all of their own housework, and so they are not occupations which could absorb more than the half dozen or so people who are now engaged in them. Nor, as compared to pottery, are they thought to be especially pleasant or easy work. Two women who formerly supported themselves by making tortillas said they had given it up because of the discomforts of working constantly over a hot fire, and because of the smoke which bothered their eyes.

The importance of monetary considerations as a motivating factor becomes evident from an examination of a sample of 10 households in which the women do not manufacture the ware.<sup>6</sup> Five of these families are definitely in the upper economic brackets of Atzompa. They include the *presidente* with his large store and extensive lands; Pomposo, the butcher, who has a handsome modern house on the main road; two wealthy farmers who have improved their positions by going to the States as *braceros* and an elderly widow, whose father was the manager of a *hacienda* and who has a house in Oaxaca where she spends part of her time. The remaining five families, while not rich, derive a comfortable income from farming.

Wealth, however, is not the only determinant of whether or not a woman works in the craft, since the majority of the potters' husbands are farmers, and some are fairly well-to-do. Rather it is a matter of wealth, combined with place of birth. In three of the ten non-pottery households, the women were born outside of Atzompa and learned the craft at marriage from their mothers-in-law. They dropped

it when they set up their own establishment apart from that of their husbands' families and decided that pottery was making was no longer a financial necessity. In five others, the women never learned at all, because they or their mothers were born outside and they married men who either came from other communities or whose mothers were born out. As one of these women put it, "My mother-in-law did not make *loza* so who was there to teach me?" Although individuals in these circumstances would not find it impossible to learn, either by trial and error or by observing their neighbors, they lack the incentives which are usually present--the tradition of pottery making, pressure from relatives, and economic need. Paulina Velasco is, to my knowledge, the only woman born into a pottery making family who does not work today. Her husband is a farmer who acquired enough money as a *bracero* to open a store. Paulina claims that she never liked *loza* and never learned well, so she was glad to be able to give it up three years ago when they started the store.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas the question of why a small number of women do not practice the craft can be reasonably well accounted for by external factors, the question of why some of the men do make pottery is more complex. Male potters are a minority and, in view of the general feeling that pottery is a female occupation, they must be classed as deviants. Yet these men do not appear different from the non-potters, nor is there any social stigma attached to men who take up the craft. They are not effeminate and although homo-sexuality is recognized as a peculiarity of several of the men in the village, these individuals are not potters, and there is nothing to indicate that this characteristic is ever attributed to a man because of his occupation. Lacking life histories or data on personality, I can only suggest that, for the present generation, family tradition is a determining factor. Sixteen of the 21 men who work at the present time have or had pottery-making fathers, and three more have married into households where it is thought normal for the men to make the ware.<sup>8</sup> Half of the male potters are related by blood or by marriage to one of two lines, the Aguilar or the Oliveras, both of which have male ancestors who were considered master craftsmen. Within families where the men work, there is undoubtedly an economic motive, although it cannot be assumed to be the crucial one, since many of the male potters have other occupations--farming or playing in the village band.

Another point, already noted, is that few of the men work as steadily as do the women, and they rarely make the *corriente* ware, specializing instead in the animals and the *juguetes*. Animals are almost exclusively men's products and *juguetes*, while also made by the women, were invented by a man, which may cause them to be looked upon as proper to the male sex. Further, it is the men who work with plaster molds and have experimented with the wheel. Thus, their techniques, as well as the quantity and type of ware they produce, serve to set them apart from the majority of the women who make the domestic pottery with purely hand methods.

The fact that in Oaxaca city, men are potters and make a variety of articles on the wheel raises the possibility that pottery, as a male occupation, has diffused into Atzompa from the urban area. This hypothesis is strengthened by the association, throughout Mexico, between men and the more modern techniques of manufacturing the ware--the wheel and the use of plaster molds. It is my opinion, however, that there have always been a small number of men in the village who practiced the craft, and that they, in contrast to the women, have always been the specialists who decorated *loza* and produced the non-utilitarian forms. In the past, as at the present time, men made *chías*, perhaps invented them, and any other ceremonial pottery which was current in the early period. If these articles were the province of particular families, it might explain why male potters are found in some households and not in others, and why, almost invariably, male potters are restricted to families which produce the specialties.

Today, for either sex, pottery appears to have few attractions outside of the money to be gained from it. In a community where pots are being turned out in almost every home, pottery making cannot be a means of winning social recognition or achieving distinction. Even those potters judged better than the average are accorded slight esteem for their finer or more elaborate products. Satisfactions which

could be termed aesthetic—pleasure in the work for its own sake or pride in good craftsmanship—are also rare. Some, like the Torres family, are proud of the diversity of their production, and some, like Soledad Juárez, who polishes her ollas more than necessary because she likes to see them smooth, undoubtedly derive a sense of gratification from a job well done. For most, however, pottery is simply a task to be performed, a part of the daily routine along with cooking, cleaning, and other domestic chores, and carried out with about the same degree of enjoyment. It is true that Atzompeños talk a great deal about enthusiasm and interest, and love for the *loza*, but it is significant that these characteristics are usually attributed to other people—especially to those born outside of the village to whom the craft is a novelty. What people emphasize with respect to themselves is how tired they are of the work and how often they become annoyed with it. One woman who told me she had been making pottery for thirty years added, "And one gets awfully tired after that length of time." Another pointed to her daughter saying, "Look at her. She is only seventeen and already she is old. We wear ourselves out with this *oficio*." As regards the difference between natives and outsiders, if the latter really have as much disinterested love for the *loza* as is believed, it is surprising that they give it up as readily as they do when the economic incentive is absent.

The prevailing attitude toward pottery as an occupation, and to some extent towards work in general, comes out in answers to a question in which I asked informants to compare pottery, farming, and storekeeping, and to rate them as to which is the hardest and which the easiest.<sup>9</sup> With the exception of several who said that a store is difficult because it requires capital, and several more who felt that it involves a lot of thinking, a store is regarded as by far the easiest. "One just sits and sells." "It is no work at all; life is happier for him who has a store." Farming is laborious because of having to work outside in the sun, and principally for this reason 30 per cent of the sample judged it harder than pottery and 20 per cent equally hard. Potters whose husbands are farmers are the group most aware of the disadvantages of the occupation, speaking of "the poor men who have to be out all day suffering in the hot sun. With *loza*, one is usually in the shade." A few mentioned the risks of agriculture, the danger of losing everything from drought or floods.

For half of my informants the pottery is the hardest, both from the standpoint of small returns and physical labor.<sup>10</sup> The hardships of the rainy season were cited, and the heat from the kiln when firing and unloading, which is considered particularly unpleasant. As compared to farming, the constancy of the work is disliked. "One suffers to sow and reap, but once the harvest is in, there is plenty to last all year. In *loza* one must work every day to get enough to live." "The *loza* is carried on daily. One makes and fires, makes and fires, with never a chance to rest." One man said that sometimes he and his wife worked so hard that they had no time to eat or drink, an exaggeration, but not as far from the truth as might be supposed. At the Aguilers, I have seen the last minute pressure to get ready for market escalate to the point where the family stayed up till two in the morning firing and glazing, and then rose at five the next day to fire again before breakfast.

Yet another drawback is the dirtiness of the work. Although I did not have a question about this, not one of my informants failed to bring it up in some context, and many thought it was the reason why I gave up trying to learn pottery making. "*Mucho se empuerca uno con el lodo*—one gets oneself so soiled with the clay." "This *oficio* is *muy cochino*—very filthy, piglike." The very term for the clay, *lodo*, meaning mud or mire, suggests the potters' attitude toward this aspect of the craft, and they all complain that from constant contact with their materials, their hands chap, crack open, and sometimes bleed. Dirt was the characteristic most often mentioned by the men who are not potters when I inquired how they felt about *loza*.

It may appear that the negative aspects of pottery making have been overstated. Certainly it should not be concluded that the Atzompeños actively hate their work or that all potters are chronically discontented. If they regard their job as hard, dirty and monotonous, they are in their own words

"accustomed to it." Most women have never done anything else, and, within the limited range of their experience, they have little with which to contrast it. And since everyone does the same thing, no one can feel unduly oppressed, except perhaps the large *apaxtle* makers. The most common reaction can best be summed up as one of unenthusiastic acceptance. As one informant said, after replying that storekeeping was easier and farming more profitable, "However, God gives each person his work."

#### Notes to Chapter 6

1. See Appendix I for the exact wording of these questions and for those which follow.
2. In this table, and those which follow, the "no answers" are not included in the totals and have not been percentaged because, for the reasons given, I do not consider them significant. Because of the small number of cases, the figures are suggestive rather than definitive.
3. *Oficios* are arranged in order of difficulty, the easiest to the left and the hardest to the right. In so ranking them I have used the judgments of the potters themselves (see page 167 above), supplemented by my estimates of the amount of labor and skill which they demand. Once again, the figures are only suggestive.
4. These six informants have in common only the fact that all are potters and have been working for twenty or more years.
5. There are some slight differences between those who stress intelligence and those who attribute ability to enjoyment of the work. More non-potters and younger people fall into the first category, more older potters into the second. There are so few cases, however, that it is doubtful if the relationships can be considered significant. Also, since some informants mentioned both factors, it is obvious that they are not, for the Atzompeños, mutually exclusive.
6. This sample represents roughly half of the non-pottery families in the village.
7. The tenth non-pottery household is entirely male, consisting of a widower and his unmarried sons.
8. This, of course, does not explain why the fathers or fathers-in-law of these men were potters.
9. See Appendix I for exact wording.
10. Six out of nine male potters said that pottery is harder than agriculture, and one that it is just as hard, so apparently it is not the easiness of the craft that has led some men to take it up.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE AESTHETIC ASPECTS OF POTTERY MAKING

Having examined various aspects of pottery making--techniques, economics, learning and motivation--it is now pertinent to turn to aesthetics, and determine in what sense, if any, pottery can be called an art, and the individuals practicing it, artists. According to the definition proposed in the first chapter, the characteristic which most clearly marks an activity as aesthetic is the kind of disinterested enjoyment which leads to the creation of new forms. This is not to say that creation occurs without deliberate intent, or that there is no pursuit of ends extraneous to art. It does assert, however, that unless action is more than just a means, it is not aesthetic.

From the standpoint of the observer or audience, the products of a craft are aesthetically meaningful when they arouse a response that is determined by their formal qualities. Function and subject matter may enter into evaluations, but there is also perception and appreciation of the manner in which they are made, which usually includes admiration of skill or technique. The Atzompeños are potentially both creators and audience, since they live with their pottery as well as make it. They will first be considered as producers, and their creativity assessed in terms of innovation, the extent to which they invent new forms. Second, the way in which they perceive the pots will be analyzed, in an effort to discover whether or not there is an aesthetic component in their response to them.

### INNOVATION

In view of what has been said about attitudes and motivation, it is hardly necessary to point out that disinterested enjoyment does not figure prominently among the Atzompeños' reasons for taking up and continuing pottery making. By their own admission, the potters derive little pleasure from their work, and few find it intrinsically interesting. If the aesthetic emotion is lacking, so, too, are its consequences, since for the vast majority pottery making is reproduction rather than creation. Motor patterns, once acquired, become habitual, and a potter operates almost automatically, endlessly repeating the same form. In the *corriente* ware, it is a matter of turning out one or two items without even slight variations. Not only are the *ollas*, *apaxtles*, or *cazuelas* of the same woman similar, but her products appear to be indistinguishable from those of every other woman in the village who makes that type of article. *Jarros* are not quite as standardized; some women round out the bodies into spheres, while others leave them elliptical. Necks may vary in height by one or two inches, or handles may be fastened on at a slightly different angle. However, when a potter has established a style regarding these features, she tends to conform to it, so that any one of her *jarros* can be readily identified by some one familiar with her work.

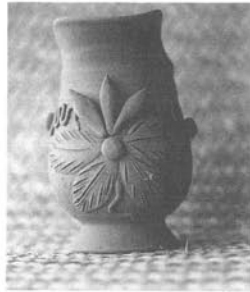
Although those who produce the *loza fina* are working with a greater range of forms, within wider limits their ware exhibits almost the same degree of uniformity as that of the *corriente* potters. Pedro Torres models by hand seven or eight kinds of red animals, yet each animal of the same species is very like another, and when they are made from molds, they are identical. At the Aguilers, a variety of objects is turned out each week, but during the eight months I was there, no change was made in any of the basic shapes. The *juguetes*, decanters, coffee pots, vases, and plates which they produced in October were similar in every respect to those which I had watched them make the previous May. Still more striking is the stability of the *bordado* designs. These are composed of a number of distinct elements, which can be combined in various ways, but certain motifs have become fixed and appear again and again. As can be seen from the photographs on the following page, the designs are altered to suit the shape of the vessel, and the smaller the size, the more they are simplified (decanter, small jarro and juguete).



**23. Bordado Designs**



Decanter by  
Manuela Aguilar



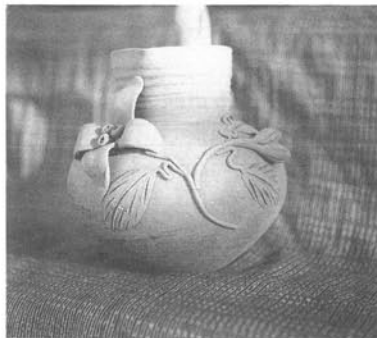
Small *jarro* by  
Chica Aguilar



*Juguete* by  
Chica Aguilar



Large *florero* by  
Manuela Aguilar



Large *jarro* by  
Lupe Aguilar



*Pichelito* by  
Chica Aguilar



Sugar bowl by  
Manuela Aguilar



*Juguete* by  
María Aguilar

Occasionally, substitutions are made. The bud which accompanies the raised flower on the large *florero* and large *jarro* is replaced by a cluster of three dots on the *pichelito* and the sugar bowl and omitted altogether on María's *juguete*. But the relationship of the elements to each other--that of the grapes or the flowers to the leaves and the tendrils-- is remarkably constant. Further, there is little individualization of the motifs. Those pictured here represent the work of four people--my *comadre* Manuela, her married daughter Lupe, living in another part of the village, and her two other daughters, Chica and María. The last two assured me that each of them could distinguish her own designs, but I could see no difference.

Another decorative form which shows less originality than might be expected is the designs (*dibujos*), incised on the *jarros* and *cazuelas* by the men. *Jarro* decorations are generally confined to names and simple geometric patterns, but those put into the fine *cazuelas* are more complex. When I asked the men where they obtained their ideas for their compositions, most replied, "from my head." One, however, was more specific and said that he had learned them in school; the teacher had taught him. It seems that the class in drawing, included in the curriculum of the village school, is the source of most of the designs. This explains both the similarity in the style and content of the motifs, which are made up of flowers, leaves, birds, and sometimes fish, and the fact that the incising is almost invariably done by the men. The women claim that they do not know how, implying that it is an innate deficiency on their part, and apparently not realizing that there is a relationship between their lack of drawing ability and their lack of formal education. María Aguilar is the only woman who does this kind of work at the present time, and she attended school for five years, an unprecedented amount of education for a girl. Designs may be somewhat modified by the skill and interest of the individuals producing them, some being more elaborate or better executed than others. The most original designs produced in the village at the present time, and to me the best, are those of Sisto Ruiz, the man who ornaments the *cazuelas* of Rosaria Cañada. Since he is a deaf mute, it was impossible to interview him, but another member of Rosaria's family told me that he often got ideas from looking at pictures in magazines and newspapers.

While innovation by potters of either *corriente* or the *fino* ware is rare, many of the articles produced today attest that it has occurred in the not too distant past. The forms of the utilitarian pottery are ancient, quite possibly dating back to the pre-Conquest era. *Chías* are also old, but most of the other specialties seem to be of fairly recent origin. Some, like the coffeepots, sugar bowls, and decanters, have undoubtedly been derived from Oaxaca, where the villagers have the opportunity to observe and imitate the factory made pottery displayed in the market. For other items it is less clear what has been the prototype, or what might have served as a stimulus, and identifying the innovator is very difficult. For the most part, the Atzompeños simply do not know who first introduced or invented a particular form, or their statements are apt to be contradictory. Two families take credit for the invention of the small whistles in the shape of animals and although probably ancient, origination of the red animals is claimed by two of the male potters who make them. Bad feeling and inter-family quarrels further confuse the issue, as is the case with the Aguilars and the Oliveras who have been at odds for years. Both families make *juguetes* and the smaller types of green glazed animals, and both told me that it was one of their immediate ancestors who had invented them. This was one conflict which I thought I was finally able to resolve by repeated questioning, deciding that the *juguetes* could be assigned to Grandfather Aguilar, the animals to Joaquín Olivera.

The two living individuals who have been responsible for major developments in pottery styles, and whose claims to have originated them are substantiated by others, are Catalina Aguilar (Tía Lina) and Teodora Blanco. The latter is well known for her musical animals which she created at the age of thirteen, around fourteen years ago. Since then, she has invented jugs in the form of birds, and experimented with human figures which she uses to ornament ashtrays. Some of these figures may be made from molds purchased in Oaxaca. This is always a delicate issue on which to press a potter too closely, and other families are quick to make the accusation that so-and-so's pots are not modeled by hand. Yet the musical animals alone are sufficient proof of Teodora's innovative abilities. Tía Lina has been equally prolific.

Along with the *bordado* designs which she started some years ago, she is said to have created, or introduced from the outside, many of the articles which the family makes now--vases, decanters, and various miniature animal forms. She has modified the *juguetes* of her father, Felipe Aguilar, Sr., and today this type of pottery is turned out in many different shapes--*jarros*, flower pots, and baskets. In addition to Tía Lina and Teodora, there are several other potters who are known to have effected minor changes in traditional forms.

Having identified the innovators, the task becomes that of describing their creative processes and accounting for the factors which produced the innovation. These are hard topics on which to obtain material, since the individuals themselves tend to be unaware of how or why they came to conceive of a specific form. None of the Aguilars could give me information on the invention of *juguetes*, beyond the fact that Felipe Sr. had started making them at the age of twenty-four, and had then taught his wife and children. It is possible that archaeological finds near the village suggested to him the notion of miniature pottery, since it was made by the Zapotecs in the region of Monte Albán and has been excavated from tombs not far from Atzompa. Long talks with Tía Lina and interviews with Teodora also revealed very little. To all of my questions as to how she happened to think of the *bordado* designs, Tía Lina inevitably replied, "God allowed me to think of them." Teodora gave me almost the identical answer--"God must have put it into my head," although she was more explicit as to what prompted her to become interested in experimenting with new forms. "I first had the desire to make something of my own when I was quite young and went to the Oaxaca museum. There I saw a figure (*mono*) leaning on its hand and I wanted very much to make one like it. I asked myself, 'Can I?', so I came home and tried." She went on to say that she still gets ideas from going to the museum, and occasionally from pictures in magazines.

The circumstances surrounding what may be termed minor innovations, those which involve the alteration of existing shapes rather than the creation of new ones, are somewhat easier to determine. For example, there is the case of the square *cazuelas* which are made only by the family of Manuel Vásquez. When I inquired about these pots, Manuel explained that twelve years ago a tourist from the States came to the house to buy *loza*. She wanted *cazuelas*, but square, and all the same size. Previously the family had made round ones, like everyone else. So, to fill the order, and be sure of getting the correct shape, the Vásquez family constructed plaster press molds. Later they tried selling the deviant ware in the Oaxaca market, and, since the city people liked it and it was simple to manufacture, they have continued to produce it. Although I know of no other specific instance in which the orders of a customer have resulted in a permanent change in the type of ware made by a family, it seems likely that this sort of stimulus, especially from foreign buyers, accounts for a good many of the specialties which have been developed in the last twenty or thirty years. Suggestions also emanate from the *regatones*, who are in a position to judge the potential market for pottery and often place special orders.

A second stimulus for innovation occurs when a potter sees new forms. These may be copied or may provide ideas for modifications in Atzompa pottery. Two women in the village have tried their hand at imitating Coyotepec ware, familiar to them from the Oaxaca market. One has made small *cántaros*, to which she gave the red finish, the other bells in the shape of female figures with flaring skirts. Both were quite frank about using as models the pottery of the other village. When I asked Belén Pérez, the woman who made the bells, how she happened to think of them, she laughed and handed me one from Coyotepec, remarking that hers were just like it except that they would be green instead of black.<sup>1</sup>

For two other Atzompeños, the multicolored ware of Oaxaca has been the prototype. Gabino Cortés, one of the male potters who specializes in *chías*, has bought and duplicated a tall, thin *jarro* from one of the city factories. He showed me the Oaxaca pot, pointing out that it had been his model, and that his had the same shape. Margarita García also utilized an Oaxaca *jarro*, but reinterpreted rather than copied the form. According to her, a *regatón* gave her a sample, a small squat jug with a protruding lip, and asked her to make one like it. The result was "*jarros aplastados--fallen-down jarros*" which she makes

today along with the classic Atzompa type. The new variety has the cut in neck and wide lip of the *pichelitos* and the usual flaring handle but the body is foreshortened and flattened, giving the pot the collapsed appearance which suggested its name. (Compare drawing of *pichilito* in figure 1, page 51, with *jarro aplastado* on plate 10, page 55.)

Once an invention or alteration has occurred, its survival depends primarily on its salability. If the *regatones* like it and order more, or if it sells well *en puesto*, the innovator will begin quantity production.<sup>2</sup> This is what has happened with the square *cazuelas* and Margarita's *jarros*; both have become popular as tourist specialties. The items derived from Coyotepec have not become part of the regular repertoire of the potters who made them, nor are they likely to, because they compete with the ware of that village. The population of the Oaxaca valley, the bulk of the potters' customers, have come to associate certain articles with Atzompa, others with Coyotepec. Accustomed to buying their *cántaros* and bells from the latter community, and having them black, they are apt to be suspicious of red or green imitations from Atzompa. The fate of Gabino's *jarros* is still in doubt, since he has, as yet, manufactured only two or three and not tried to market them.

For some years following its introduction, the production of a commercially successful innovation is restricted to the immediate family of the person responsible for it. Gradually, however, it begins to diffuse through the village, almost always along family lines. Just as a potter is supposedly not taught the craft by anyone other than a relative, it is believed that what has been invented by a particular family belongs to that family and its descendants. This is manifestly not true of the old forms whose origins have been lost, although even the production of these items is usually acquired by birth or by marriage, but the "ownership" of new ones is generally recognized. Reportedly there have been instances in which people have married, or at least proposed marriage, in order to obtain the right to manufacture certain types of ware. In the opinion of Chica Aguilar, several of the offers made to her had been "for the *juguetes*", and she felt that the in-laws of her recently married sister had shown an unseemly degree of haste in beginning to turn out the *bordado* designs. I was also told that Juana Velasco, the Aguilar's cousin, had received repeated proposals from a man who wanted to learn the decanters and other specialties she makes. Sometimes a person resents having to share her knowledge in this way, and, as a result, diffusion is blocked. Another relative, Tía Rosa, stopped making decanters when she married, because she did not want to have to teach her husband's family.<sup>3</sup>

The spread of a new item can be illustrated by the *juguetes* which have been in existence for approximately fifty years. Of the eleven households producing them today, six are direct descendants of Felipe Aguilar Sr. and three more are related to the line by marriage. Among the latter, are two of the Olivera lineage, an alliance which allowed the Aguilars to acquire the animal forms. For the two remaining families, the chain of inheritance is more tenuous. Carmen Núñez, mother of Teodora Blanco, makes *juguetes* because her father-in-law learned them from a *compadre*, who in turn had been taught by his cousin, Felipe Sr. In a similar manner, Rosando Regis and his family have a right to the miniature pots because Felipe taught another cousin who passed on his skills to one of his cousins, Rosando's grandfather.

While the ethics of ownership are accepted in theory, they are not always respected in practice. A man who has no connection with Teodora has recently started producing musical animals similar to hers. Although she is aware of his activities, she can do nothing about it beyond deprecating the quality of his work. He has the reputation of being an imitator, copying the products of other potters which he sees in the Oaxaca plaza. He is not the only one who engages in this practice; several families are beginning to experiment with the *bordado* designs. At present the *bordado* is made commercially only by the Aguilars and the households into which their daughters have married, but I came across two people who had tried it out on their *jarros*, and a third woman proudly showed me a small *olla* which she had



decorated. If the *bordado* diffuses in this way, "illegally," it will probably undergo some variations since it will be picked up and reproduced from memory rather than directly taught.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the cases discussed as examples of innovation consist of copying models from the outside rather than creating original forms. I have included these, both because they introduced new forms, and because the individuals doing the copying were at least trying something new to them, while the majority of the potters never venture beyond the limits of their own *oficios*. One may well ask why the level of creativity is so low, particularly in a community in which almost every household produces pottery and there are close to 800 working potters. I can identify four reasons which stem from the way the craft is practiced and the way in which it is transmitted from one generation to another.

First, the selection of pottery making as an occupation is not based on interest or talent. A woman becomes a potter regardless of whether she feels she will enjoy the work or has an aptitude for it. This is somewhat less true in respect to the men, and it is not, I believe, accidental that two of the four individuals who can be identified as having introduced major changes in the ware are males--Felipe Aguilar Sr. and Joaquín Olivera. The second factor is the circumstances under which the potters work. I have stressed the fact that pottery is an industry with constant pressure to produce in quantity and to meet schedules. These conditions are not conducive to creativity which requires a certain amount of leisure time to mull over new ideas and follow them up. It may well be that the artistic potential of many individuals has been stifled for lack of time to develop them. Again, it is worth pointing out that the men are less pressured than the women; their participation in the craft is on a part time basis.

Working conditions also engender an attitude of indifference, deadening the critical and analytical faculties necessary for creative thought. Since it is an activity which involves repeating the same thing day after day, pottery comes to be regarded as a monotonous task, to be lightened by any outside diversion that can be carried on at the same time. If the Atzompeños had radios, I am sure they would be inveterate listeners. As it is, they talk, joke, argue, and eat while they work. At the Aguilars, the making of the *bordado* designs was an assembly job, not an act of creation, and I have seen Chica engrossed in a magazine while her fingers skillfully applied the pellets. It is not surprising that the ability of the hands is emphasized, since this is so often the only part of the potters that is occupied. Usually, they are operating purely by habit, not concentrating on, or even thinking about, what they are doing, a state of mind which is quite the opposite to that of the artist.

Third, there are functional requirements of the ware. Although I have talked a great deal about the specialties, it must be remembered that they account for no more than a fraction of Atzompa's total production. Most of the pots are strictly utilitarian, and quite simple in form. An *olla*, to be an *olla*, must be of a particular shape, and the possibilities for variation are slight. Similarly, other domestic articles do not invite improvisation--the *apaxtles*, *cajetes*, *comales*, and common *cazuelas*. To fulfill their functions they must have certain characteristics, and these limit the formal modifications.

Finally, originality is not valued. Something different may be admired once it has been created, but children are taught to approximate as closely as possible the pottery of the older generation. The criticisms of Esperanza's *juguetes* "because they are not like ours," the way in which my efforts at decorating were corrected to make them more like the designs of the family, and the fact that a beginner's pots are usually reworked by an adult, all indicate the importance placed upon conformity to an established norm. This norm, rarely verbalized, is adherence to the traditional forms and manner of working.

Counteracting these factors, which stabilize style and discourage change, are the weaker ones which promote it. These include the suggestions and demands of buyers, including *regatones*; the desire to exploit the tourist trade, and the exposure to new forms which are occasionally found exciting enough to reproduce. The greatest force for change, however, is the rare individual who, for some reason,



transcends the limits of tradition and creates something totally new. Today, Atzompa has two such potters, Tía Lina and Teodora. While I cannot pretend to explain them, either as artists or individuals, there are circumstances in the lives of both of them which are somewhat out of the ordinary, and which merit brief examination.

Teodora is an energetic young woman of twenty-seven with a good business head, well aware of the monetary advantages to be gained from her work. She comes from one of the well-to-do families in the village, farmers who own and cultivate their lands, and from one of the more sophisticated in the sense of being city oriented. Her mother is not a native, having been born in San Jacinto, which is somewhat more urbanized than Atzompa, and Teodora has many relations and acquaintances in that community. At the same time she participates fully in village life. Her uncle is the *presidente*; she is *comadre* to various families, and has been a sponsor of fiestas. Clearly, she is not a social deviant, and seems unlike the conventional stereotype of the artist. The unusual element in her background is experience which has been wider and more varied than that of the average potter. Few Atzompa children are taken to visit the Oaxaca museum as she was, and, being exposed to new forms, she reacted to them. It is also significant that her musical animals were invented when she was thirteen, shortly after she began to learn the craft, which suggests the importance of play as a factor in inventiveness. The financial situation of her parents, and the fact that her mother did not come from a pottery making family, mean that she was probably not pushed into production as most children are, but was free to regard the clay as an amusing toy, and to experiment with shapes that caught her fancy.

By contrast, Tía Lina was born into a family with a long tradition of pottery making, and one where the craft was taken very seriously. According to her, her father, Felipe Sr., was a hard taskmaster who kept his daughters steadily at their work. "There was no laughing and talking permitted in the house when I was young." Since at that time the Aguilar family were comparatively wealthy, it was apparently more a matter of discipline than financial necessity. Today, at the age of fifty, she has reacted against the regimentation of her early years and works only occasionally, complaining of the heat which makes her hands heavy or of the mezcal she drank which has made her veins sick. Intelligent and forceful, and an indefatigable conversationalist, she is the socially minded member of the family, spending much of her time visiting or instructing her nieces in correct behavior.

The peak of Tía Lina's creative activity came at a later date than Teodora's, when she was an adult woman. It is my belief that one of the principal influences was her relationship to her father, who was apparently a stern and rather overbearing man. Her attitude towards him, as revealed in her reminiscences of her youth, is a mixture of pride, admiration, resentment, and some guilt. Her innovations could be explained as an attempt to live up to his exacting standards, but they could also be interpreted as a rebellion against him and his accomplishments. Her major invention, the *bordado* designs, has completely changed the style of his *juguetes*, turning them from strong, simple forms into an elaborate profusion of leaves and flowers. (See plate 24.) There is yet another circumstance; the *bordado* designs were originated about thirteen years ago, after a long illness, brought on by an unhappy love affair. Her parents had forbidden her to marry a man who was leaving the village to fight in the revolution, and she was much broken up over it. "I prayed that I would become sick, and I did. Then my father, who before had been very harsh and used to hit me, couldn't do enough for me. He prepared special foods; I could have all the clothes I wanted; he adored me like a saint. Yet what good did all that do when the heart was grieving?" I do not wish to invoke the compensation theory of art, or to suggest that suffering and frustration are necessary conditions for creative achievements. It does not seem entirely implausible, however, that Tía Lina, blocked in other aspects of her life, turned to the only outlet available to her, the pottery, using it as few in the village do, as a vehicle for self-expression.

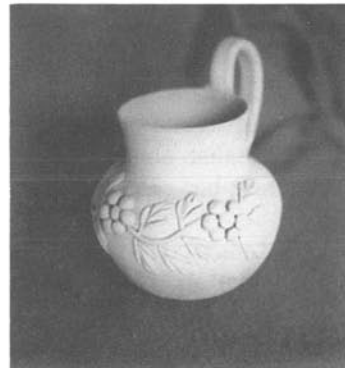
## 24. The Pottery of Catalina Aguilar



Decorated flower bowl



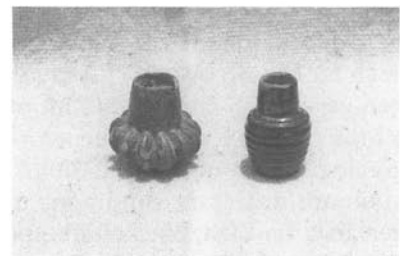
*Tía Lina*



Decorated jarros



*Juguets* made by *Tía Lina* today



*Juguets* made by  
Felipe Aguilar Sr.  
about 1905

## AESTHETIC STANDARDS

The Atzompeños make relatively few comments or evaluations about their pottery which would reveal aesthetic standards. Their criticisms of beginners' work indicate the characteristics considered essential for any ware which they judge well made--evenness, symmetry, and delicacy. The last, however, is in part a functional requirement, since it is often linked to the fact that the contents of a thin vessel will boil more quickly. Words like pretty (*bonito*,) or, more frequently, the synonym *chulo* are sometimes applied to pots, but it is by no means certain that they have an aesthetic meaning. The same words are used to describe a variety of things--the weather, social situations, a person's behavior or character. The nearest approach to a judgment on appearance, divorced from function, comes in regard to the finish of pottery. As has been noted, one type of clay is preferred over another solely because, in the unglazed ware, it fires to a darker color, an orange-red and not the pale yellow, which is thought "sad". Color is also important in the glazed pottery, and when the green "comes out clear and tender," a piece is admired regardless of what other qualities it may have. A second value is smoothness, and well polished pots are said to have more elegance.

In an attempt to obtain more explicit information on standards, I used photographs of various articles from Atzompa, both decorative and utilitarian. Included with these were pots from other parts of Mexico, i.e., a Coyotepec *cántaro*, a *jarro* and a water jug from Tehuantepec, a *jarro* from Puebla, a water jug from Tzintzuntzan and plates from several areas, including Oaxaca city. The pictures were arranged in series on seven separate cards, and on each card the articles were juxtaposed according to function.<sup>5</sup> Informants were asked to compare an Atzompa *olla* to a Coyotepec *cántaro*, which is also used for water; a decorated *cazuela* to plain ones, and so on. Presumably function was held constant, allowing the aesthetic component, if there was one, to be isolated. The photographs were shown to 161 individuals. They were given the cards, always in the same order, and asked to choose from each which article they liked the best and to tell why. There were 115 women and 46 men, ranging in age from ten to seventy; and thirteen of the informants came from households not producing pottery.

Along with general reactions to the pictures, I was interested in the extent to which informants agreed on the choice of the best pottery and their reasons for that choice. Specifically, the dimensions which were expected to emerge were reactions to "foreign" forms as compared to the familiar ones made in the village, and distinctions between decorative and utilitarian pottery. Four series of pictures were designed to elicit opinions about the first dimension, three series about the second, and on one series both dimensions were represented. A second facet to be investigated was factors determining the responses, and about these some tentative hypotheses were formulated:

- 1) People producing the fine pottery and the specialties will view outside pottery more favorably than those making the domestic ware, because they are more accustomed to seeing and handling a variety of forms. The most conservative in this respect will be the people who produce no pottery at all.
- 2) Specialists will be most apt to make their choices in terms of formal characteristics, while non-potters will be the least influenced by those characteristics.
- 3) Specialists will be the most critical and at the same time, the most interested in the pictures. In other words, it was assumed that the specialists would be "connoisseurs."

The results were far less revealing than I had hoped. There was no problem in getting people to respond to the pictures, as all were cooperative and most seemed to enjoy looking at them. Questions were asked about some of the outside ware--in what village had it been made?--and there were attempts, often correct, to identify the households or individuals who had produced the local pots. Essentially, however, none of my hypotheses, were substantiated.

Most Atzompeños are receptive to foreign forms. Only two people did not choose an article from outside on at least one of the five series, and 106 individuals or 66 per cent of the sample, selected it on three of them. They are also overwhelmingly in favor of decorated ware as compared to plain. The reasons offered for their choices indicate that there is response to formal characteristics. Some employed only very general terms--"pretty," "well made," "elegant," but others were more exact. When choosing the decorated pottery, they specified that it was because of the design, sometimes mentioning the elements of which it was composed. They spoke of form: "It has a better shape; the neck on the other is too wide;" "This one is best because the handle is not so short." However, there was little consensus as to which criteria were important for any particular object; for example, some people chose the Puebla *jarro* because of the neck, while others ignored that characteristic and preferred it for a different reason. Just as there was no relationship between choices and reasons given, there was little consistency between the choices themselves. Those who picked the foreign form on one series of pictures did not necessarily like it on any of the others, and to a lesser extent the same is true of those who preferred the decorated ware. Informants appeared to be judging each series entirely on its own merits rather than following some general criterion.

An attempt to relate the choices and reasons to background variables--age, sex, occupation, and type of pottery produced--proved to be equally inconclusive. There was a slight tendency for men to select the decorated pots and for women to choose the ones from the outside, but the differences in the responses are too small to be considered significant. Age has somewhat more effect. The old (ages fifty to seventy), as compared to the young and middle groups, quite definitely prefer Atzompa ware, and the plainer types of articles (see Appendix IV, Tables 1 and 2.<sup>6</sup> This can perhaps be accounted for by the fact that many of the specialties are fairly new, and that the older Atzompeños like *loza* to which they became accustomed in their youth. Also, the 17 individuals who picked the outside pots four times out of the possible five times include a greater proportion of young people. The age range is ten to fifty years, but the mean is twenty-four, lower than that for the sample as a whole which is thirty.

*Oficio*, which so clearly determines the potters' opinions about learning the craft, appears to have little influence on aesthetic standards. Specialists and *corriente* potters in pottery producing households do not differ in their preference for decorated or plain pots, although their non-potter relatives prefer the decorated (Table 3). Moreover, there are no differences between the three groups in regard to receptivity to foreign forms. When asked to choose from a series showing painted plates from Tzintzuntzan, Jalisco, and Oaxaca city, and two incised *sartenes* from Atzompa, the groups were equally, and by a large majority, in favor of one of the foreign plates. Occupation does appear to be a factor when individuals from pottery producing households are compared with those from households where no one makes the ware. The Puebla *jarro* was chosen almost twice as often by members of non-producing households (Table 4), and there was the same pattern, though less striking, for water jugs (Table 5). This kind of difference was not found for the decorated pottery, and the reasons given for choices did not relate to either household occupation or pottery *oficio*.

There is a small group of 21 individuals who can be considered "connoisseurs". When I classified informants on interest, using as an index the amount and kind of comments they made, these people came out as the most interested. They exclaimed over the pictures, identified the articles correctly, even some of those from the outside. They knew where they had been manufactured, and made detailed comparisons between them. Their choices, however, show no agreement and do not differ from those of the majority. The only characteristic they have in common is sex; 12 of them were men, a far higher proportion of males than is represented in the sample. Six of these men are potters and the rest come from pottery producing households. Among the women "connoisseurs," there are no specialists and two are from families who do not make pottery. Indeed, of the 161 informants interviewed, the most enthusiastic and critical responses I got to the pictures came from a woman from one of the *ranchos* who had learned *jarros* from her mother-in-law at marriage but has not worked in the craft for years.



Why did the photographs fail to elicit the type of material which I had expected? There are two possible reasons, one of them being the nature of the stimulus. With visual as with verbal instruments, there is always the problem of whether the stimulus means the same thing to the informants as it does to the investigator. Validity is more in doubt if the stimulus is one which has not been commonly used or standardized for the population to which it is being applied. The second reason concerns the strength and saliency of the opinion being investigated. It is true that some Atzompeños did perceive the pictures of pottery in a way which I define as aesthetic—they enjoyed them and they did seem to be making choices on the basis of form—but that they were responding to photographs, not objects. It was an artificial situation, and they were making hypothetical choices.

In daily life pottery is rarely judged on artistic merit. When the Atzompeños buy *loza*, or make it for their own use, they never choose the decorated ware. Although they may think that it "looks prettier," more essential considerations, chiefly economic ones, enter in; the *loza fina* is more expensive. Along with price, function is important to them. This became very evident in answers to a question I put to my smaller sample of 66 individuals, asking them what they thought of the pottery of Coyotepec—did it please them? Well over half replied in terms of the durability and usefulness of the ware, saying that Coyotepec *loza* is pleasing, but that it breaks easily and cannot be put on the fire. Some added that the *cántaros* are "pretty for water", which suggests that many of the comments which seem to be based on formal qualities are in reality concerned with function. When the difference in the appearance of the pottery of the two villages was mentioned at all, it was usually linked to finish and diversity. Coyotepec pots are all one color and one kind, whereas Atzompa products are green and made in a greater variety of shapes.<sup>7</sup>

It can be concluded that although an aesthetic component does exist in perceptions and evaluations of the pottery, it is very weak, and not operative in most situations. This finding, although not what I anticipated, is consistent with the way in which the potters regard the craft. They are, as they put it, "tired of pottery", and it is not surprising that their interest in their products is not much greater than their enthusiasm for the work itself. In the group of individuals who show the most interest, and whom I have classified as connoisseurs, two-thirds are removed from the daily grind of mass production—the men and the few women who do not make pottery. All members of this group seem to perceive the pots as artistic forms, but they are in the minority, just as is the rare person for whom pottery is a means of creative expression.

It must not be assumed that because pottery making is not an art, the Atzompeños are without aesthetic values. Such values are not the most prominent ones in village life, but they do exist, particularly in relation to religious activities. Church services are enjoyed and described as "very beautiful," and fiestas are elaborate and costly. From the standpoint of the time and money that are sacrificed to maintain them, fiestas can be considered the focal or central aspect of the culture, and they offer satisfactions of an aesthetic as well as a religious nature. Along with excitement and escape from the monotony of the daily routine, fiestas provide pageantry, music, and drama. Personal appearance is another area in which, for the women at least, aesthetic considerations are important. Clothes and jewelry always provoke comment, and are admired for their color, texture, and design. In terms of the interests and values of the villagers themselves, it would have made more sense had I asked them to compare and criticize different types of clothing, rather than pottery, which is viewed in almost completely utilitarian terms.

#### Notes to Chapter 7

1. Although actually cases of copying rather than invention, I am including examples of this kind under the heading of innovation because they result in the introduction of new forms into the village.



2. The *regatones* may also be responsible for increasing the production of traditional forms. A man who has a pottery stall in the Oaxaca market told me that the Torres brothers, who are his *compadres*, used to make the red animals only occasionally. About five years ago he asked them to turn them out by the dozen; they would sell very well. They took his advice and are now selling in quantity.
3. Leonard Adam points out that informal copyrights of this sort are not uncommon in many primitive and peasant societies. Adam, 1949, pp. 73-74.
4. The *bordado* done by the copyist is, as yet, inferior to that of the Aguilar.
5. See Appendix III for the reproduction of some of these photographs.
6. Two other tables, not reproduced here, show this same pattern. Older informants chose common Atzompa *jarros*, rather than decorated, twice as often as did the other two age groups, and 60% (as compared to 24% and 42%) preferred one of the Atzompa water jugs to one from Tzintzuntzan. In all tables, differences of less than 10 per cent are not considered significant.
7. This is one of several bits of evidence which suggest that diversity should be considered an aesthetic value for the Atzompeños: pots that differ only slightly in form are given different names, and certain potters are admired because they produce a variety of items.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study has been an attempt to describe pottery making as it is carried out in a small rural community of southern Mexico, and to specify the role of the craft within the matrix of village culture. One of the results of the investigation is that, in Atzompa, the manufacture and use of pottery is predominately non-aesthetic. There is a low incidence of innovation, little enjoyment of the work or the products, and only a slight tendency to perceive the pots as art forms.

Although data which would permit a detailed comparison of Atzompa with other pottery producing communities is lacking, there are indications that the village is not unique in respect to the small number of individuals who may be defined as creative. In Coyotepec, according to all students who have visited it, there is but one outstanding potter. In Tzintzuntzan, Foster found one woman whom he felt could properly be classified as an artist, since she, unlike the others, experimented with her technique and invented new forms.<sup>1</sup> Among the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest, Bunzel was struck by the uniformity of the ware, as it was made in each of the separate villages, and was able to identify only two individuals who, in recent years, have brought about a change in styles.<sup>2</sup> To what extent this condition may be considered typical of crafts other than pottery, or may be generalized to other regions of the world, it is difficult to say. It is my own opinion that a dearth of creativity prevails in many of the folk arts, in Mexico and elsewhere, and that surveys of wide geographic areas, such as Africa or Oceania, give a somewhat false impression of the variety and richness of the articles produced in any one community.

The functional significance of pottery making in Atzompa is clearly economic. Motives for learning and practicing it are monetary, as they are for agriculture and other occupations, and, as the basis of subsistence in the village, the craft provides a small but steady income for the majority of the population. In large part, economic factors determine what types of pottery are made, and the desire to exploit the potentials of the tourist trade is one of the few incentives for innovation. At the same time, it is economic necessity which drives the potters to mass production, with its attendant pressure to produce rapidly and in quantity. This, in turn, is one of the principal conditions which inhibits creativity and stabilizes style.

Pottery is fundamentally an economic institution, but it is also a domestic one. Kinship patterns impinge on it, since *oficios* are inherited by birth or by marriage, and, through them, the individual obtains the right to manufacture new types of pottery. Conversely, the influence of the craft on family life is very extensive. It more than doubles the work of the women, leaving them almost no leisure time, and occasionally forces them to pay to have their household tasks performed. It gives the girls a full-time occupation from the age of ten on, allows them little or no schooling, and, because they have a means of earning money at home, makes it unlikely that they will leave the village to seek employment in the city. The lives of the men are not so totally dominated by pottery, but it may decrease the authority which they can exercise over their wives, since in many households it is the women who provide the weekly income and essentially support the family.

Between pottery making and other facets of village culture there is comparatively little interdependence. The craft has no connections at all with the political structure and its relations with religion have been much attenuated. The abundance of funeral urns and other ceremonial objects found in the tombs of Monte Albán attest to the religious significance of pottery in the Oaxaca valley during the Prehispanic period. Today, however, only a few items are made which could be classified as ritual in nature--the flower vases and incense burners which adorn church altars, the *chías* which are planted at

Holy Week. Religion is no longer, as it undoubtedly was in the past, one of the major forces stimulating invention and production. No aspects of the craft now have sacred connotations. Although it is probable that rites of some kind were once an integral part of various phases of the manufacturing process, no ceremonies, either pagan or Catholic, are carried out by the potters to insure success in their work.<sup>3</sup>

Historical materials are insufficient for a detailed reconstruction of the craft or the changes which have occurred in it. What evidence there is suggests that pottery making in Atzompa is very ancient, that many of the forms are Prehispanic in origin, and that within the last fifty years there has been a proliferation of forms invented or introduced from the outside. These developments have been accompanied by a trend toward more decorative ware. The present study also suggests that women have always been potters of utilitarian ware, while a few of the men have engaged in the manufacture of specialties.

Future developments in Atzompa cannot be foreseen with any accuracy, but several predictions will be ventured. When Oaxaca state industrializes, and the buying power of the population increases, hand-made pottery utensils will be replaced by factory produced articles, probably of metal. A shift in this direction can already be seen in the use of gasoline tins which, because of their lightness and durability, are beginning to be preferred as water carriers to the earthenware *cántaros* of Coyotepec. A decline in the demand for domestic pottery will put many villagers out of business, and some, at least, will turn to making the specialties. If the market for these articles continues to expand, more men are likely to take up pottery making and, as a consequence, one could expect the adoption of the more modern techniques which are now used by a few of the male potters--press molds and the wheel. In time, the craft may come to be organized into workshops.

Atzompeños who are not absorbed into producing for the tourist market will have to look elsewhere for a means of earning a living. Within the village, farming offers almost the only alternative to pottery, and here opportunities are limited because of the scarcity of land. Many villagers, therefore, will be forced to seek employment on the outside, perhaps in Oaxaca city. If mining industries open up in the area, some may find jobs in this occupation. There may be more pressure to go to the United States and remain for longer periods, or to settle there permanently.

Changes of any kind will take place in Atzompa only as they occur within the wider context of the Oaxaca valley and southern Mexico as a whole. At the present time, the south lags behind the northern and central portions of the country, which are now moving towards industrialization and a better standard of living. Yet, even in these regions, the old patterns are slow to give way to the new ones, and there are many communities which continue to live at an Indian-colonial level and to practice the traditional crafts. It seems likely, therefore, that pottery making as it is now carried out in Atzompa will undergo few fundamental changes in the immediate future and that it will remain one of the central complexes of village culture for some years to come.

#### Notes to Chapter 8

1. Foster, 1948, p. 99.
2. Bunzel, 1929, pp. 86-88.
3. In Tzintzuntzan, Foster observed a potter make the sign of the cross over her materials" ...so that the Virgin will smile on her and that the breakage will be slight." Foster, 1948, p. 82.

## APPENDIX I

### QUESTIONS USED IN INTERVIEWING

The following questions were asked of a sample of 66 individuals from 59 pottery making families. The sample consists of 44 women and 22 men ranging in age from seventeen to seventy. All of the women are potters as are 11 of the men. The remaining males are husbands or sons of potters and participate in some phase of the manufacturing process.

1. ¿De todas las cosas que se hacen en Atzompa tales como ollas, jarros, cazuelas, apaxtles, comales, ollas, apaxtles grandes, y juguetes, que cree usted resulta ser lo mas dificil y trabajoso? (Of all the things that are made here in Atzompa—*ollas, jarros, cazuelas, apaxtles, comales, big ollas and apaxtles, juguetes*—which do you believe is the most difficult, the most work to make?)

2. ¿Qué cantidad de tiempo toma el aprender á hacer la loza? ¿ una semana, un mes, un año, ó cuanto? (How much time does it take to learn the pottery? Does it take a week, a month, a year, or what?)

3. ¿Es facil ó dificil hacer la loza ? (Is it easy to learn pottery or hard?)

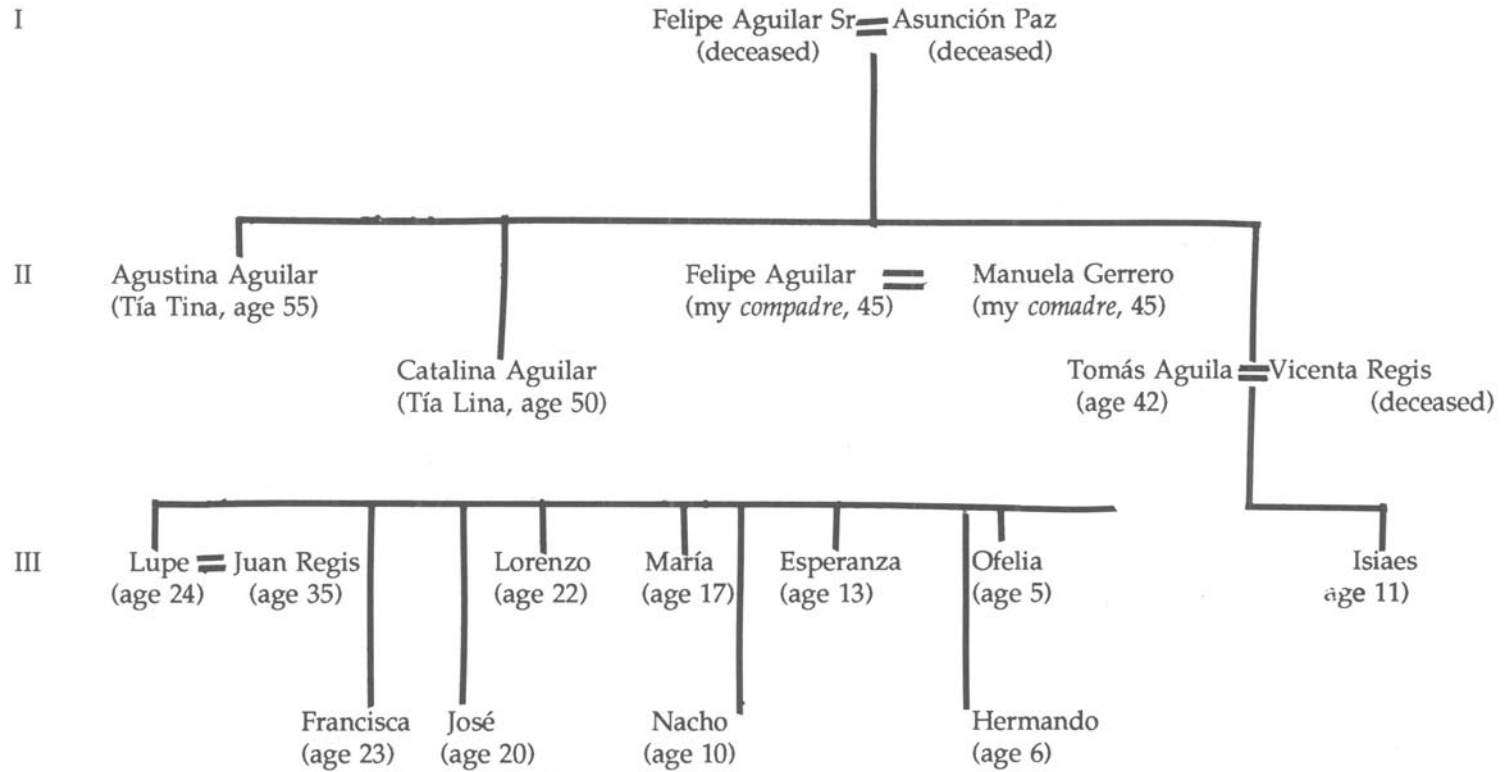
4. ¿Existen algunas diferencias en cuanto a la habilidad de aprender a hacer la loza? ó todas las personas aquí en Atzompa lo hacen igual. (Are there differences in the ability to make pottery, or does everyone in Atzompa make it equally well?)

5. ¿Quienes tienen mayor facilidad para hacer la loza, los hombres ó las mujeres? (Who has more facility for pottery, men or women?)

6. Alguna gente dice que personas que vienen de otros pueblos y aprenden a hacer la loza, cuando llegan a ser mayores resultan haciendolo mejor que las que nacen aquí en Atzompa. ¿Es cierto ó no? (Some people say that the people who come from other villages, and learn pottery when grown, are able to make it better than those who are born here in Atzompa. Is this true or not?)

7. ¿Qué le parece la loza de Coyotepec? ¿Le gusta o no? (How does the pottery of Coyotepec seem to you? Does it please you or not?)

APPENDIX II  
THE AGUILAR FAMILY



Single horizontal lines indicate blood relationship in the same generation; double lines indicate marriage.



## APPENDIX III

### PLATES

The plates below are reproductions of the photographs which were used in the attempt to elicit data on aesthetic standards. The originals were approximately twice the size of these and they were not marked or identified in any way. The titles that are attached here have been added for the sake of clarity in presentation.

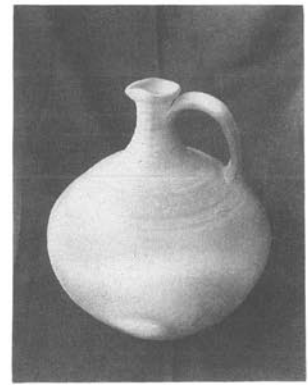
#### Series 1



Decorated Atzompa  
*jarro*



Common Atzompa  
*jarro*



Tehuantepec  
*jarro*

#### Series 2



Atzompa *jarro*



Puebla *jarro*

Series 3



Common Atzompa *cazuela*

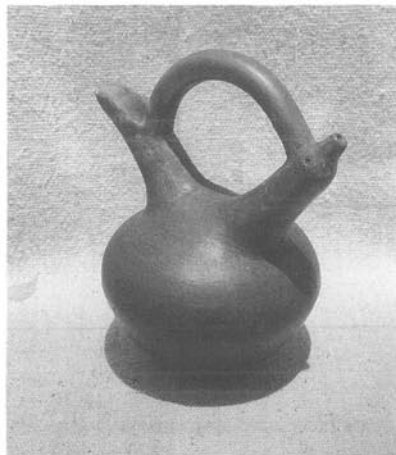


Decorated Atzompa *cazuela*

Series 4



Tzintzuntzan water jug



Atzompa water jug



Atzompa water jug

## APPENDIX IV

## TABLES

The following tables have been selected to show the relationship, or lack of relationship, between choices made on a series of photographs of various types of pottery, and the background characteristics of the sample of 161 individuals making the choices. The photographs, some of which are reproduced in Appendix III, are of common and decorated ware of Atzompa, and pottery from other Mexican communities. They are arranged in a series numbered one to seven.

TABLE 1

## Choices on Photograph Series 1, by Age

	Young (Age 10-29)	Middle (Age 30-49)	Old (Age 50-70)
	%	%	%
Decorated Atzompa <i>jarro</i>	48	49	34
Common Atzompa <i>jarro</i>	22	23	49
Tehuantepec <i>jarro</i>	30	28	17
(Number of cases)	(60)	(66)	(35)

TABLE 2

## Choices on Photograph Series 3, by Age

	Young (Age 10-29)	Middle (Age 30-49)	Old (Age 50-70)
	%	%	%
Common Atzompa <i>cazuelas</i>	31	45	66
Decorated Atzompa <i>cazuela</i>	69	55	34
(Number of cases)	(58)	(65)	(35)

TABLE 3

Choices on Photograph Series 3, by Type of Pottery  
Produced by the Individual

	Makes Common Ware %	Makes Specialties %	Makes Nothing %
Common Atzompa <i>cazuelas</i>	49	48	32
Decorated Atzompa <i>cazuela</i>	51	52	68
(Number of cases) <sup>1</sup>	(88)	(32)	(25)

TABLE 4

Choices on Photograph Series 2, by Occupation of Household

	Pottery Producing Household %	Non-pottery Producing Household %
Atzompa <i>jarro</i>	64	31
Puebla <i>jarro</i>	36	69
(Number of cases)	(147)	(13)

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<sup>1</sup>The 13 individuals from non-pottery producing household are not included.

TABLE 5

Choices on Photograph Series 4, by Occupation of Household  
and by Type of Pottery Produced by Individual

	Pottery Producing Household		Non-pottery Producing Household	
	Makes Common Ware	Makes Specialties	Makes Nothing	
	%	%	%	%
Tzintzuntzan water jug	56	62	64	85
Atzompa water jugs	44	38	36	15
(Number of Cases)	(88)	(32)	(25)	(13)



## APPENDIX V

### GLOSSARY OF SPANISH WORDS

- A medias*. On shares, a system of sharecropping  
*Aire*. Air, usually evil, that causes sickness  
*Alcalde*. Municipal judge  
*Almud*. Measure of area equaling about one-seventh of an acre; also the amount of corn obtained from that much land  
*Angelito*. "Little angel," a baby that has died  
*Apaxtle*. Pottery basin  
*Arcos*. Arches separating the fire box in the kiln from the chamber where the pots are stacked  
*Ayudante*. Fiesta official whose job it is to collect money
- Barrilito*. Tall pottery jar used for storing water  
*Barrio*. District or section of a community  
*Barro*. Clay  
*Barro áspero*. Gritty clay used as temper  
*Basura*. Trash used as fuel in the kiln  
*Bordado*. Decorated; in Atzompa refers to designs modeled in relief  
*Bracero*. Day laborer; a Mexican who contracts to work in the United States  
*Brujo*. Witch
- Cajete*. Large shallow bowl  
*Cántaro*. Globular jar used for carrying water  
*Cantina*. Bar or shop where liquor is sold  
*Carga*. Load equaling about 400 pounds  
*Cazuela*. Pottery casserole  
*Centavo*. Hundredth part of a peso  
*Coco*. Bowl part of the Atzompa jar  
*Colorado*. Red; the red finish given to pottery  
*Comadre*. Term used for women in the *compadrazgo* relationship  
*Comal*. Flat clay griddle  
*Compadrazgo*. System of ritualized friendship between individuals, the most common type being that established between the parents and godparents of a child  
*Compadre*. Term used for men in the *compadrazgo* relationship  
*Corriente*. Common, as opposed to fine  
*Criada*. Maid, female servant  
*Crudo*. Unfired  
*Cuchara*. Spoon, a piece of gourd used to scrape the pottery  
*Cuero*. Leather used in working the pottery  
*Curandero*. Curer  
*Chía*. Striated pots planted with seeds at Easter  
*Chifle*. Whistle  
*Chiquito*. Small
- Día de plaza*. Market day  
*Dibujo*. Drawing, design

*Ejido*. Common or public land. Following the Revolution of 1910-20, grants were made to communities, to be worked collectively or individually.

*En puesto*. In a stall; selling in the open market as distinguished from selling to the middlemen

*Encargado*. Ordered; to sell on order

*Encomienda*. Right granted to the early Spanish colonists to exact tribute and services from a stipulated number of Indians

*Fandango*. Marriage feast

*Fino, fina*. Fine as distinguished from common

*Florero*. Flower vase

*Grande*. Large

*Gringo*. North American, person from the United States

*Hacienda*. Large landed estate

*Horno*. Oven or kiln

*Jacal*. Hut

*Jardinero*. Flower pot

*Jarro*. Jug or jar

*Juguete*. Toy, miniature pot

*Licorera*. Pottery decanter

*Longuita*. Strip of clay

*Loza*. Pottery

*Loza corriente*. Common pottery, the domestic or utilitarian ware

*Loza fina*. Fine pottery, decorated ware and specialties

*Maceta*. Flower pot

*Madrina*. Godmother

*Mayordomo*. Official who sponsors and finances a religious celebration

*Mediana*. Medium (sized)

*Medio verde*. Half (glazed)-green

*Mestizo*. Descendant of a Spanish-Indian union

*Metate*. Grinding stone

*Mezcal*. Intoxicating drink made from the maguey plant

*Molde*. Circular earthenware slab used as a base in working pottery

*Mozo*. Hired hand, male servant

*Municipio*. Municipality

*Nene*. Baby

*Novio*. Sweetheart

*Olla*. Globular shaped jar with a wide mouth

*Olla de aza*. Jar with a handle over the top

*Oficio*. Occupation or craft; used in Atzompa to refer to the type of pottery made by a family or an individual

*Padrino*. Godfather

*Petate*. Straw mat

*Pichelito*. Jug with a spout and a foot

*Presidente.* Mayor, first in authority in the municipal council

*Rancho.* Community with a population of less than 100 and administratively part of a larger unit

*Raspador.* Scraper, tool used in pottery making

*Rebozo.* Long scarf or shawl worn by the women

*Regatón.* Merchant or middleman; here used specifically for merchants who buy pottery for resale

*Rezador.* Man who prays

*Sarape.* Shawl or blanket worn by the men

*Sartén.* Shallow casserole

*Solar.* Lot, plot of ground surrounding a house

*Susto.* Fright, a psychosomatic ailment

*Tejate.* Beverage made from ground corn and chocolate

*Tía.* Aunt

*Tío.* Uncle

*Todo verde.* All (glazed) green

*Tona.* Guardian spirit acquired at birth

*Tortilla.* Flat corn cake, staple in the Mexican diet

*Vela.* Wake

*Verde.* Green; in referring to pottery, glazed green

## APPENDIX VI

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