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**RESEARCH
REPORTS**

GLAZED CERAMICS FROM JALAPA

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Photographs: by the authors

Geographical Location

The department of Jalapa is located in the eastern region of the Republic of Guatemala and covers an approximate area of 2,063 km². It is divided into 7 municipalities, which are as follows: 1. Jalapa; 2. Mataquescuintla; 3. San Carlos Alzatate; 4. Monjas; 5. San Luis Jilotepeque; 6. San Miguel Chaparría; and 7. San Pedro Pinula.

According to the data from the Censo General de Población de 1950 (1950 General Population Census), the department had 75,190 inhabitants, of which 37,186 were ladinos and 38,004 were indigenous. As of today, logically, these figures have changed.

Its climate is temperate and healthy—many people believe that only the climate of Antigua Guatemala compares—although in the higher areas it is extremely cold. For example, in La Soledad, the elevation reaches up to 8,000 feet above sea level.

Its soil produces excellent conditions for crops typical of hot, temperate, and cold climates. As a result, the inhabitants, for the most part, grow maize, beans, rice, potatoes, cassava (yuca), chili, coffee, bananas, tobacco, sugarcane, and wheat, with some of these crops concentrated in specific areas. For example, tobacco is grown in Monjas, coffee in Mataquescuintla, and wheat in Jalapa, specifically in the villages

of Jumay and Potrero Carrillo. However, due to the poor land distribution, farmers often migrate to the farms in the south from October to January.

They also engage in the raising of cattle, horses, and pigs.

Etymology

From the Mexican word *Xalapán*, which originates from *Xaxalli*, meaning sand and bread: great abundance.

The predominant Indigenous group in this area is the Pocomam, although some claim that there are also a few Xinca present.

As for Indigenous clothing, it is only in San Luis Jilotepeque that traditional dress is still worn; the process of ladinization is occurring throughout the entire department.

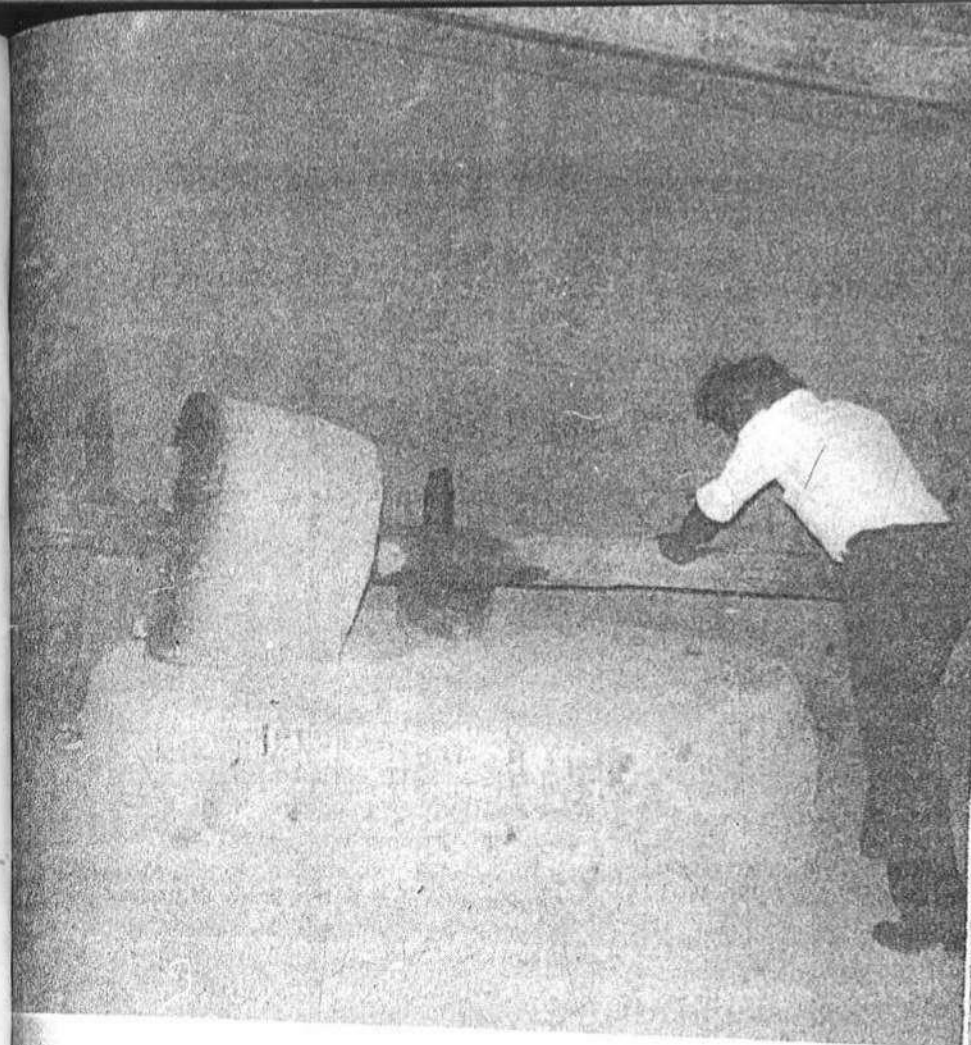
In the department of Jalapa, we find, in addition to what has been mentioned, that it has beautiful manifestations of popular art, with San Luis Jilotepeque standing out in this aspect for its pre-Hispanic-rooted pottery, which includes some of its most artistically crafted products, such as red-bottomed jars decorated in black. Also, San Pedro Pinula, where its inhabitants work with palm to create satchels, hats, and sacks. Furthermore, the craft that motivated this research: pottery made in the departmental capital.

The city of Jalapa is divided into five neighborhoods: *La Democracia*, *El Porvenir*, *Chipilapa*, *La Esperanza*, and *San Francisco*. In the latter, there are around 50 pottery workshops, according to one of the informants. However, the most complete one is located in the *La Esperanza* neighborhood. Its owner, Don¹ Carlos Alberto López, who is 29 years old, is a native of Jalapa and is married to Mrs. Eva Haydée Aguirre de López, with whom he has four children. The family group is completed by Don Carlos's father, Don Víctor Manuel López, who is in charge of one part of the workshop, as well as a sister and a brother who helps with packaging when they can.

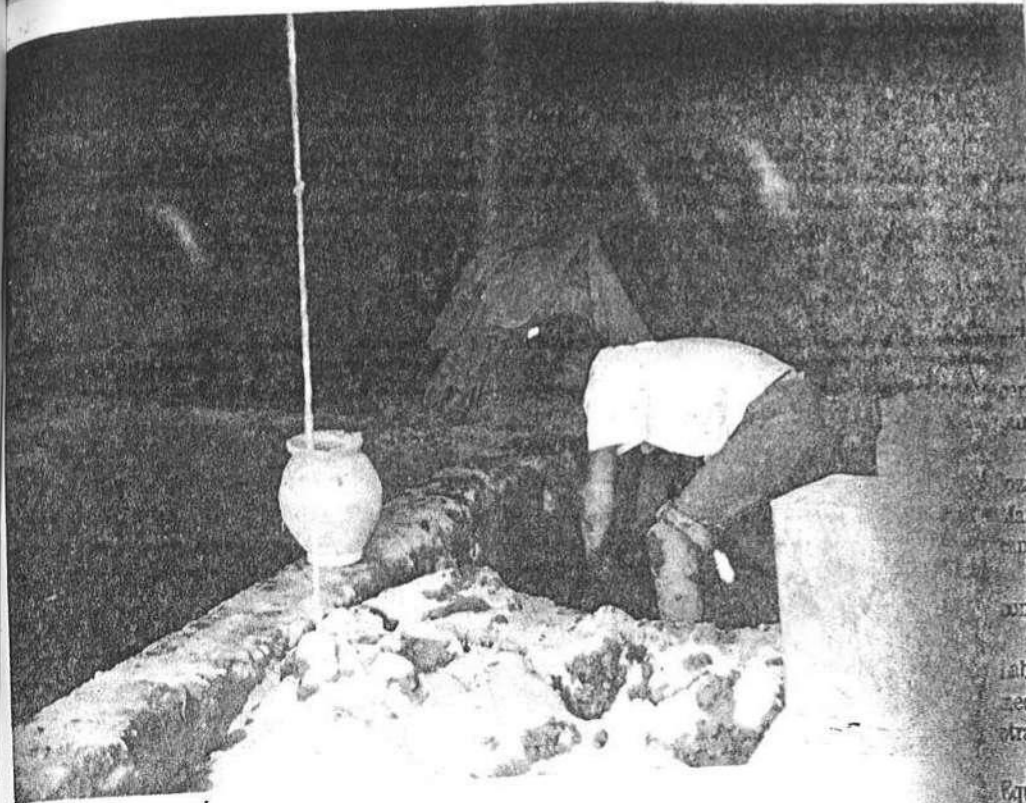
Currently, considering the lifestyle of Don Carlos A. López's family, we can place them within the middle class of Jalapa. Don Carlos, who became our main informant and who, within the work system, carries out the role of potter using the wheel, learned this trade from his father.

Don Víctor Manuel López has worked in pottery workshops since the age of seven: first in Pinula, then in Mataquescuintla and Sanarate, finally settling permanently in Jalapa in 1941.

¹ Don: commonly used today for addressing senior people in Guatemala, the English variation is Mr.



The mill, operated by human power, is used to grind the clay.



*Pileta*² for soaking the clay.

2 Pileta: a rectangular ground-level reservoir used to store water.

Raw Materials

Among these, we have the main ones: black clay in clumps and white sa, which are purchased by the cartload and extracted from areas outside the town, "in lands near the cemetery" —as they say— and from the *Jumay* hill.

The pinewood, used for the firing, is brought from the hills, especially from the *Potrero Carrillo* village "because the pure flame is needed, and that's what is mostly found here."

Lead is used in the glazing process of the pieces. The finer pottery requires antimony "for the yellowish greens." Manganese is used for browns, cobalt and zinc for green, with a greater amount of cobalt used to achieve black.

All the combinations of these oxides are achieved by mixing them with white sand and water.

In this workshop, the oxides are purchased already pre-mixed from the *Laboratorios Kosmos*, in the capital, where they are ordered through Don Ricardo Cruz, who will be mentioned later in another stage of the work.

Equipment

This workshop has the following equipment: the mill, which is responsible for grinding both the black clay, the white earth, and the sand. This mill operates through a diesel engine, adapted by Don Víctor Manuel López, the father of our informant.

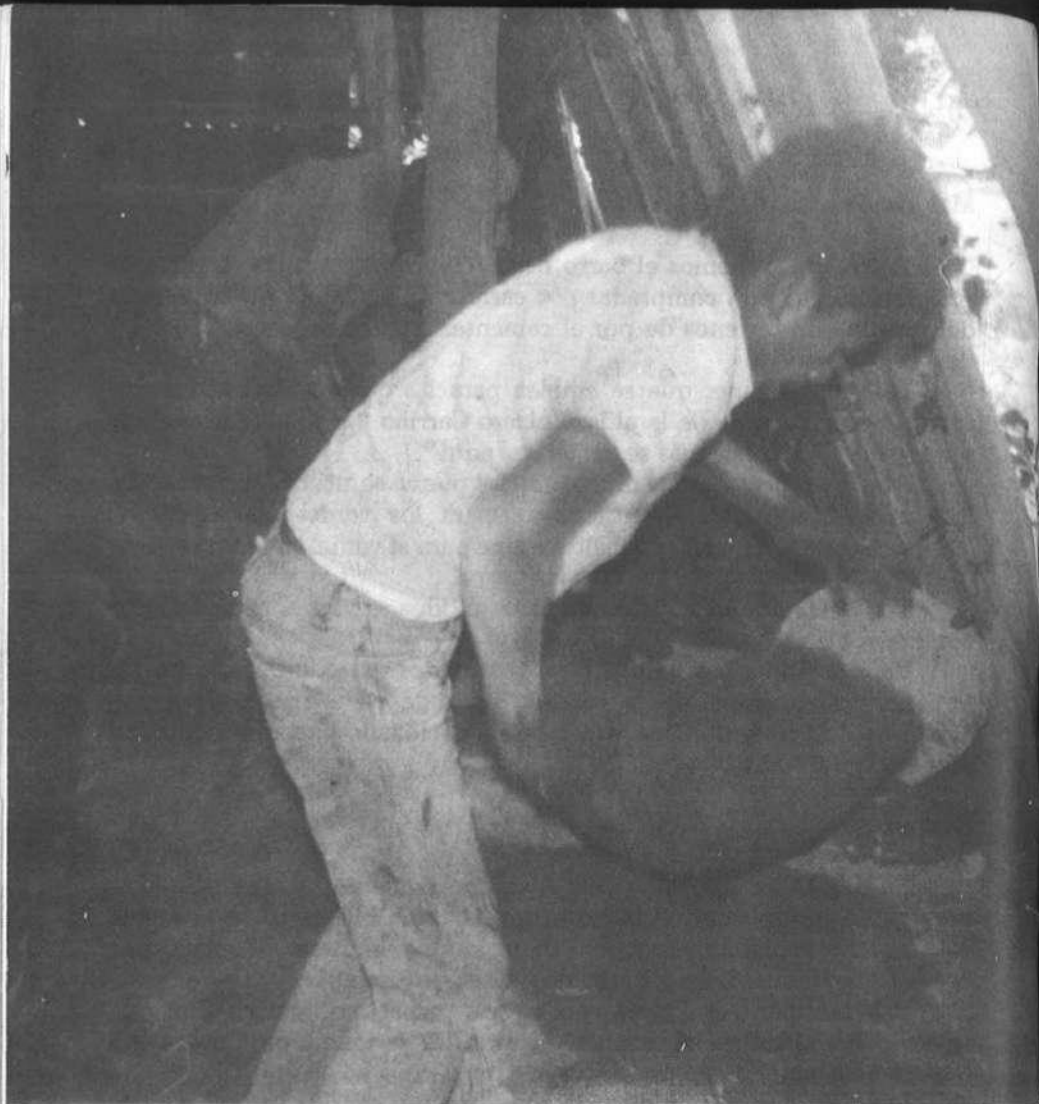
There are also sieves for their respective use, similar to those used by builders. Hoes and wheelbarrows are used to organize and transport the main raw materials.

The most important devices in the process are the potter's wheels, made in Jalapa, which consist of the following parts: a large wheel, which the operator spins with their foot; a bearing that facilitates the wheel's movement; the central shaft or small pillar; and finally, the so-called *cabezuela*³, which is the part where the lump of clay is placed to begin shaping the piece.

Additionally, there is a long beam, clamps with screws, and leather cushions, "to ensure it is perfectly aligned," according to what Don Alejandro Méndez, one of the master potters, explained.

There are also other tools or utensils—however one may choose to call them—used to produce the actual piece: *casco*, a piece of broken

3 *Cabezuela*: is the small wheel on top of the potter's wheel.



Transporting the clay lumps.

vessel for shaping the interior; cane, for the exterior; rubber or *alpayata* for the edge of the piece; string or twine to separate the finished piece from the remaining clay lumps; and an iron scraper used to shape the base of the pieces.

To measure the height and width of a piece, they use a measuring tool made of two sticks, one vertical and the other horizontal.

They use wooden planks to transport the finished pieces from one place to another.

Production process

The black clay is left out in the sun to dry when it is brought in clumps. After drying, it is passed through the mill and then through the sieves so that it comes out "pure, very fine, without any grit or anything."

The white earth is processed in the same way.

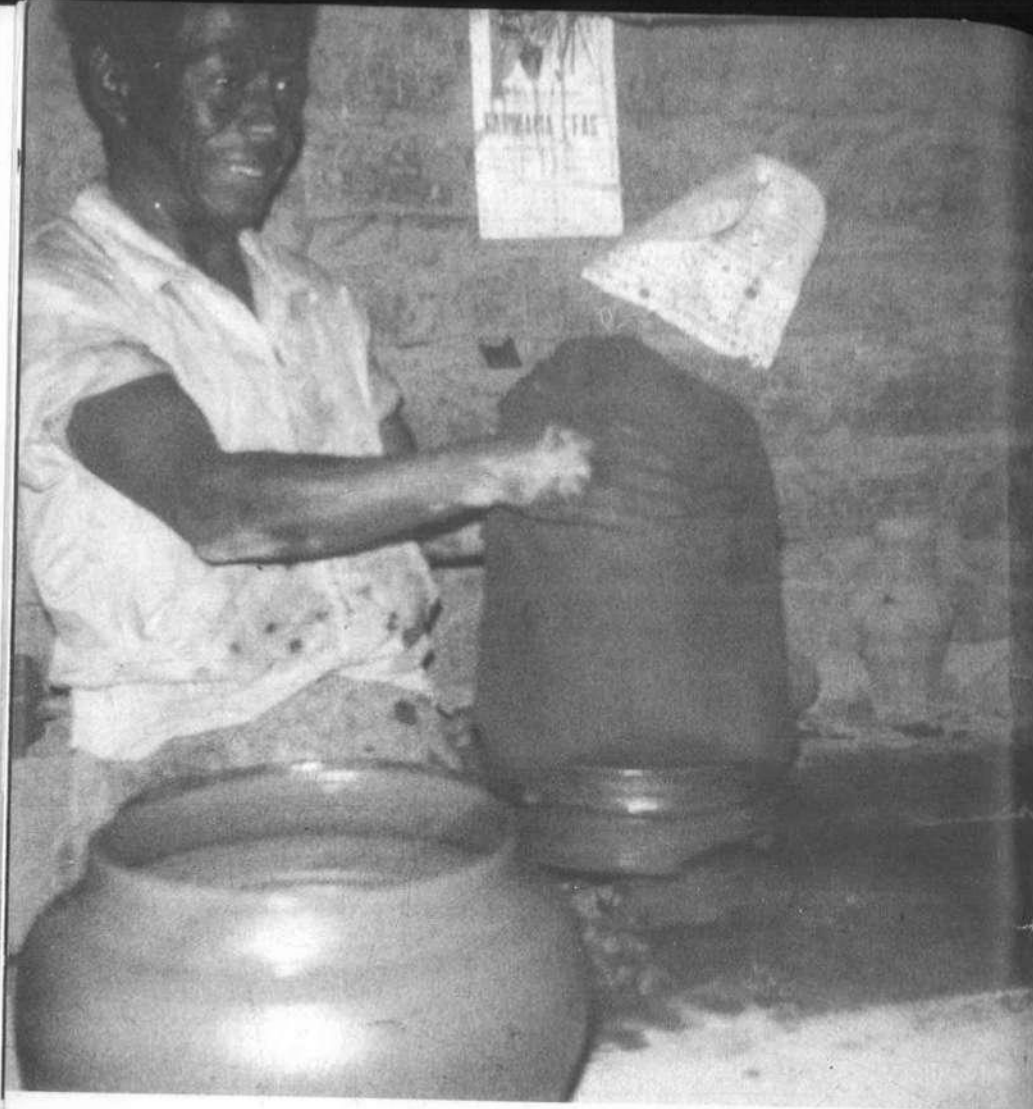
The clay is transferred to the *piletas*, where it is mixed with 35% white earth, "so the pots don't crack." In one of these *piletas*, it is left submerged in water for a period ranging from 24 to 72 hours or more, depending on when it is needed; this stage is called soaking (*moja*).

From here, the clay is transferred to another *pileta*, where it is stomped with the feet by a young person, "fine-tuning it really well so it settles" at the same time, the necessary amount of earth is mixed in to make it "harder." When the person considers the clay has reached the right consistency, they remove it from the *pileta*, forming large mounds which are covered with plastic to "prevent it from drying on top." They leave it in this state for 24 hours before transporting it by the pile to the place where the clay lumps are shaped.

A third *pileta* is used to soak the clay and white earth left over from the waste of the sieves. This mixture is left in the *pileta* for a period of time before being removed and reused. It is important to note that clay does not rot.

To make the *peyas* (clay lumps), the process begins by kneading the clay on stone slabs, continuously sprinkling very dry white earth over it to prevent it from sticking. What they are doing is "massaging" it so that it becomes finer. Once kneaded, the clay lumps are formed.

These go directly to the potters. When the clay lumps are laced on the *cabezuela*, the shape is gradually formed by applying hand pressure, starting with the *anchete* (the base or initial form). First, the interior is shaped using the *casco*, as previously mentioned, and then the exterior is shaped with the cane.



The potter in front of a clay lumps.

In the next step, they use rubber or *alpayata* to smooth the rim of the piece, or in other words, to finish it.

To cut the finished piece from the remaining clay, they use a string or twine.

During these steps, the potters use a simple pot of water in which they soak their hands to keep them from drying out and to make shaping the clay easier.

A single clay lump can be used to produce, depending on the size, up to four large pieces.

In addition to having a strong sense of height and width measurements, after producing a certain number of pieces, the potters pause to check if they are staying consistent. In other words, the skill they've developed through practice is verified using a cross made from two tied sticks, the measuring tool mentioned earlier.

The carriers are responsible for taking the pieces and placing them on the shelves, where they dry in the shade for three days. From there, they are moved on wooden planks into the sun, where they continue drying for about 2 hours; if there is no sun, they go directly into the kiln for the first firing. Placing the pieces in the kiln takes approximately 3 hours.

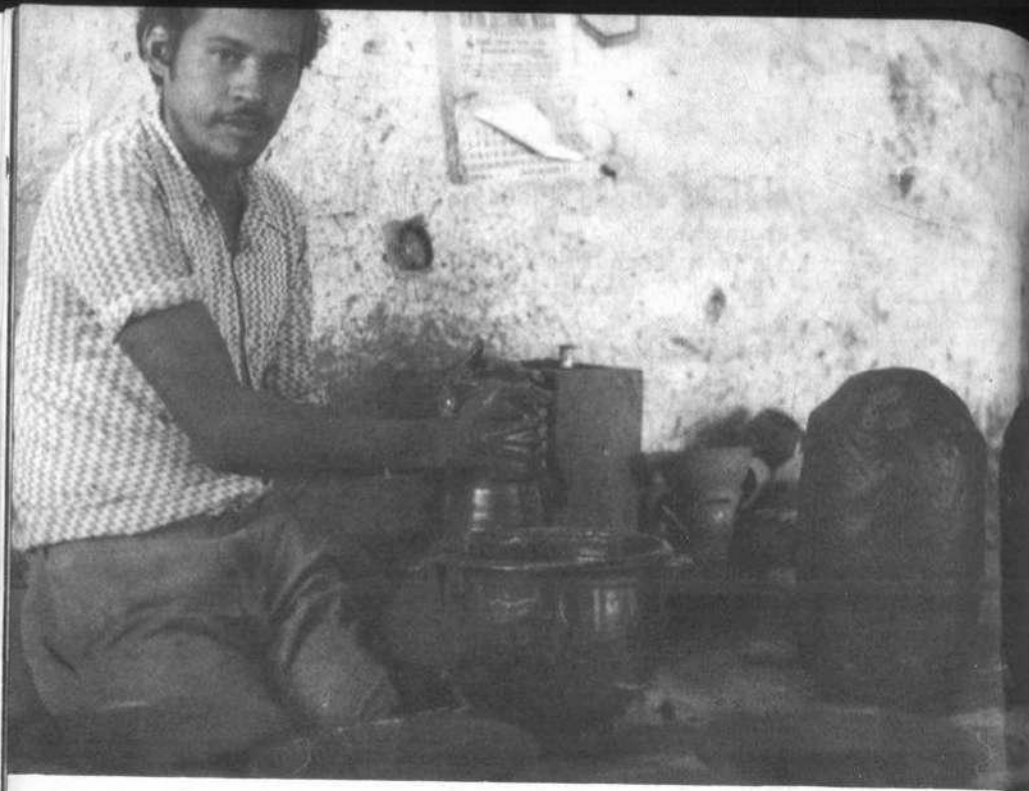
The first firing lasts 4 hours; during the first 2 hours, the kiln is only lightly heated so that the pieces dry gradually. For this, only 4 or 5 logs or wood chips are used, keeping the kiln warm. During the following 2 hours, the actual first firing takes place.

The kiln reaches up to 1,500 degrees, and around 500 logs are used, about 5 loads, more or less. In this first firing, 4 stokes are used - each stoke consists of 150 logs-. For the pieces to fire properly, the kiln must increase and decrease in temperature, so the person in charge of the kiln waits for one stoke to burn almost completely before adding the next.

After this first firing, some simply glazed pieces are decorated by the same handlers using brushes and copper-based paint, which gives them a green color. Fine ceramics do not have painted decorations, but items like *batidor*⁴, flowerpots, bowls, and sometimes plates and sugar bowls do.

Before the second firing, the glazing process takes place by immersing the pieces, one by one, into large containers called *vidriaderos*, which contain lead oxides, finely ground white sand, and water.

⁴ Batidor: a type of small pot.



Shaping a piece on the wheel

In the second firing, the kiln is heated for 2 hours, followed by another 2 hours to fire the pieces. Stokes are added with 30-minute intervals between each.

The third firing is carried out in the same way as the second: first, the kiln is heated, then the pieces are fired. This final firing is only necessary for finely glazed ceramics; simple glazed ceramics require only two firings.

Work system

The workshop is manufacturing-based. There are 4 adults (men) working at the potter's wheel, producing different types of pieces.

The other workers are children (referred to as *patojos*⁵ by the adults), who handle simpler tasks such as sieving the clay and white earth. There is also a young person who mixes the oxides in the *piletas*.

Children are also responsible for preparing the clay into clay lumps and for helping pack the finished pieces.

The adults in charge of the mill and the kiln are two in total.

The workshop is divided into several sections:

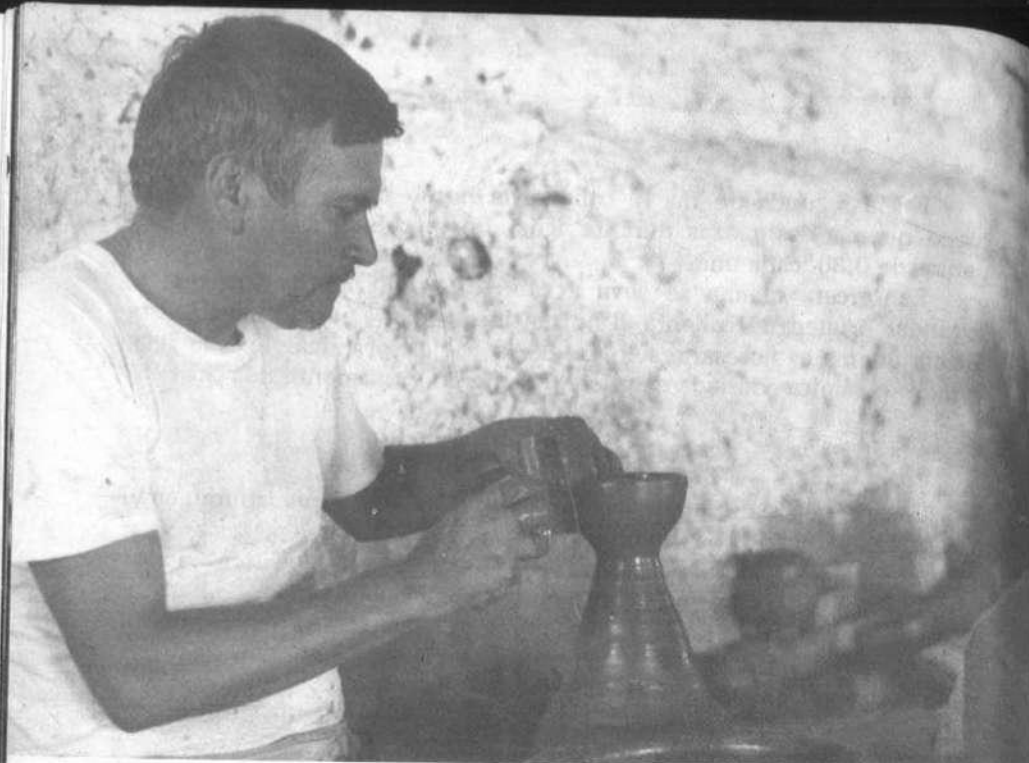
- A) In the first section, the clay is prepared, it is ground, sieved, and mixed, along with the white earth;
- B) In the second section, the clay lumps are prepared, and the potters (wheel workers) are located; and
- C) In third section is the kiln.

In addition to the main sections mentioned earlier, there is a storage room at the back of the house where the unfinished "raw" pieces are kept, to be completed according to demand. There are also two rooms with finished pieces waiting to be picked up by the transporter who comes for them.

The workshop's schedule runs from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. in the mornings, and from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the afternoons, Monday through Saturday. However, they sometimes work overtime until 10:00 p.m., without the extra hours being acknowledged or compensated for the workers.

The wife of our informant, Doña Eva Haydée Aguirre de López, is the person in charge of handling product sales in the store they have for that purpose. The total number of employees working in this workshop is 18.

⁵ *Patojo*: Guatemalan slang used for boys.



Refining the shaped piece.

6 INTECAP: Guatemalan institution leader in technical training for youth and adults.

7 Quince años: is a valued tradition that celebrates a young girl's new milestone into adult hood (15 years old.)

The people who sell raw materials to the workshop are not part of it.

The product and its distribution

Most of the pieces made at "3 X," the name of the workshop, are simply glazed: pots, *batidores*, bowls, plates, casseroles, flowerpots, and jugs. In fine glazing, they produce candlesticks, ashtrays, vases, lamps, cups, jars, various decorative items, and dinnerware for six or eight people, in different shades of green and brown, and as a characteristic of Jalapa, also in black.

The glazing is produced on a large scale, approximately as follows: up to 56 dozen units of the *batidor cerito*; up to 40 dozen of No. 1; up to 32 dozen of No. 2; up to 28 dozen of No. 3; up to 22 dozen of No. 4; up to 15 dozen of No. 5; and up to 10 dozen of No. 6.

As for pots, production reaches a maximum of 30 dozen units of No. 0; up to 20 dozen of No. 1; up to 14 dozen of No. 2; up to 12 dozen of No. 3; and up to 10 dozen of No. 4.

From the *obra tendida*, that is, the large bowl, up to 36 dozen are made: from the small one, up to 40 dozen. From the large casserole No. 3, up to 14 dozen; from No. 2, up to 12 dozen; and from No. 1, up to 22 dozen. From flowerpot No. 4, up to 11 dozen; from No. 3, up to 16 dozen; from No. 2, up to 22 dozen; from No. 1, up to 30 dozen; and from No. 0, up to 36 dozen.

The fine glazing work is done on the potter's wheel by Don Carlos López, who has been dedicated to this craft since 1970, after having completed two training courses offered by INTECAP⁶.

They also produce plaster molds to make ashtrays and ornaments in various shapes, with inscriptions related to welcome ceremonies, weddings, *quince años*⁷, etc. This work is done by children, as it is an easy task. All these small pieces, just like the cups made on the wheel, are increasingly sought after by people from the town to give as memento.

In the workshop's store, pieces of fine glazed ceramics are on display.

The everyday or simple glazed wares and occasionally one or two pieces of fine glazed ceramics, "since these are very expensive" are brought from the capital city by Don Ricardo Cruz and sold at La Terminal Market. These wares are widely used by the local people, as they are delivered weekly by truck, along with smaller bundles sent by chicken buses transport, keeping Don Ricardo's stall well stocked.



View of the potters at the wheel in the workshop

⁸ *Chirmol*: sour sauce consisting mainly of roasted tomatoes, onions and lime juice, sometimes also containing roasted garlic, cilantro, salt, and pepper and often spicy.

⁹ *Cakic*: colhearty soup or stew, made with turkey.

In the poor houses of Jalapa, pots are used to cook corn and beans, *batidores* to make coffee, saucepans for rice, and large saucepans for making tamales. Bowls are used for chili and *chirmol*⁸, large bowls for drinking *cakic*⁹ when they have guests, and pots for cooking beans. Additionally, some fine glazed candle holders are used.

Don Carlos uses his own creations in his home: in the corridor, we find a wide variety of flowerpots, and in his dining room, dishes of different colors and styles.

In Jalapa, aside from *Don Carlos's* workshop, there are around 50 others, none of which produce ceramics with pre-Hispanic roots. Most of them work only with simple glaze, which is Jalapa's traditional type of ceramics; in a few, fine glazing is also done. This type of glazing began to be produced in Jalapa on a small scale starting in 1970, after several potters attended training courses at **CENDAP**, now **INTECAP**, where they learned about different types of oxides and how to mix them, which led them to develop new glazes.

Costs

The clay is transported in lumps, by cartloads. The price of one cartload is Q.1.50, which amounts to 1 cubic meter. The white clay has the same price.

The prices for some oxides are as follows: 1 pound of cobalt, Q.12.50; 5 pounds of manganese, Q.5.75; 1 pound of antimony, Q.10.50.

The sieve workers earn between Q.0.45 and Q.0.55 daily, and sometimes even up to Q.1.00 per day. Those with more experience and who are older tend to earn more. Occasionally, they may also take on other tasks, such as when the person who operates the mill also sifts or performs other types of work.

The potters, who are considered the most important people in the entire workshop due to the way they shape their pieces and the care they put into making them, are paid based on the amount of work they can produce that is, they are paid by piecework. According to information provided directly by the potters, they can earn up to Q.3.00 per day on average, depending on the size of the pieces and how quickly they are made.

Meals are not included in their salaries.

Regarding the lifestyle of these individuals, it is worth noting the progress they have achieved. The informant's father, *Don Víctor Manuel*

López, has just received his diploma as a teacher of Urban Primary Education (*Educación Primaria Urbana*). He is currently 52 years old and, as he stated, is determined to dedicate himself to teaching after a lifetime devoted to manual labor.

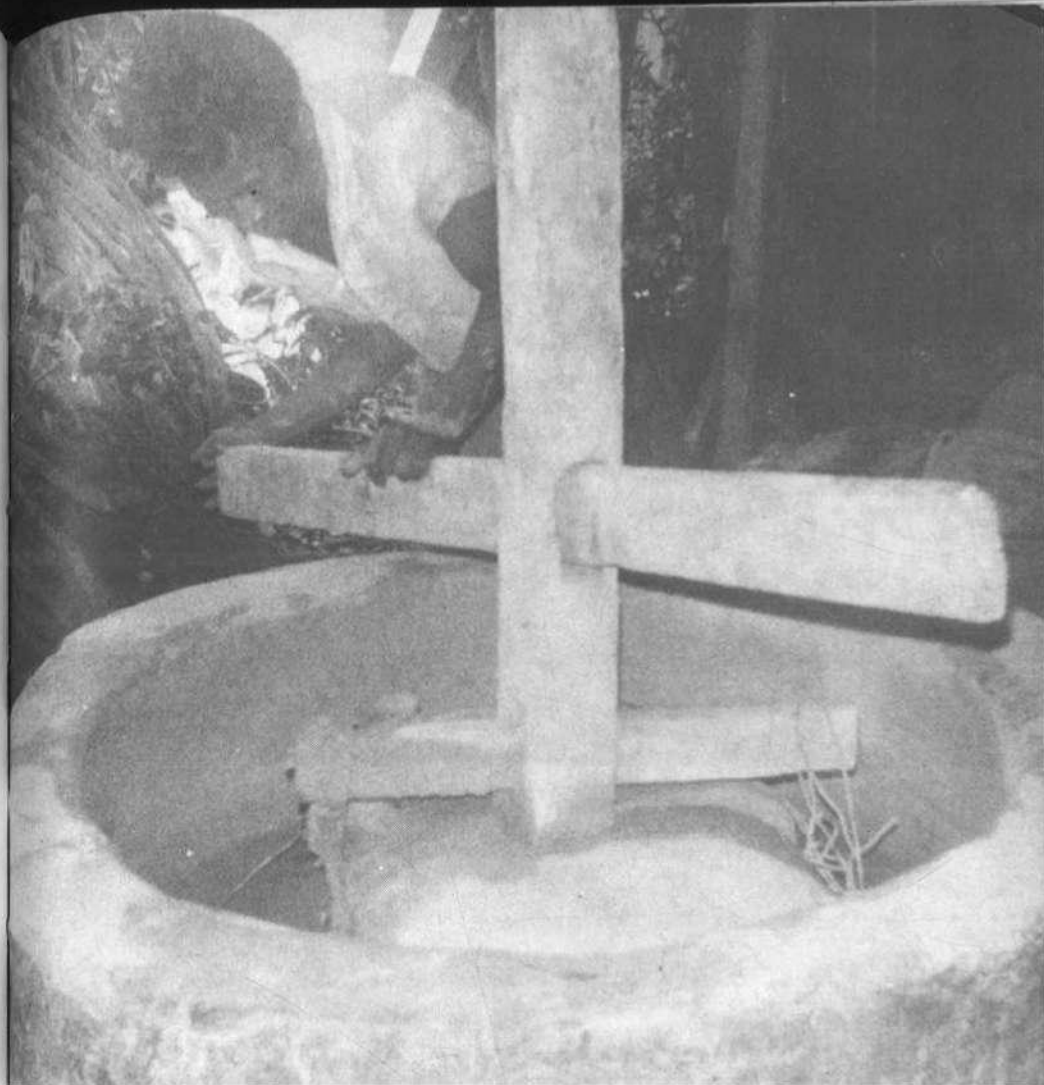
The home of the López Aguirre family belongs to Don Carlos Alberto, since his father lives in the place that originally housed the workshop, which was later moved to its current location for reasons of space. The property is divided into two parts. In the first, we find Don Carlos's residence, where he lives with his family.

There is also a shop there where he sells his products. In the second part, we find the ceramics workshop, located at the back, with its various sections.

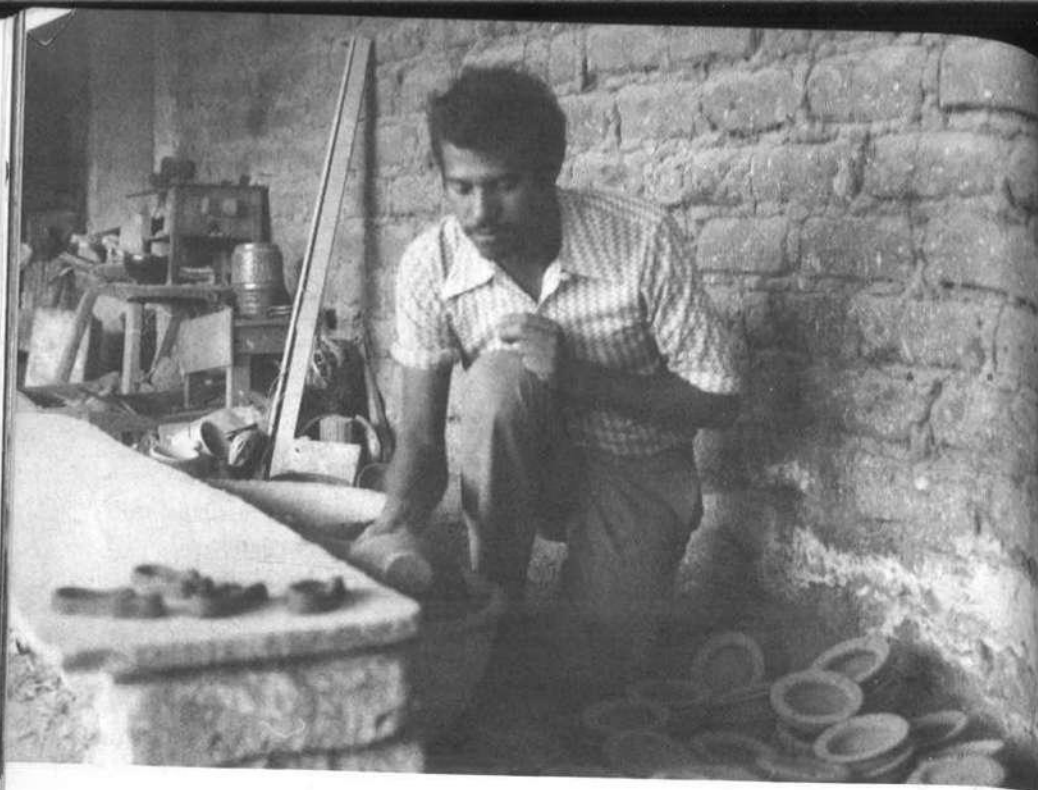
The building is made of rough-cut adobe.

The workshop has a large gate through which the carriages of clay and white earth enter.

The house occupies approximately half a block in total. Including, of course, the small plot of land where corn, beans, and squash are planted, which complete the family's diet.



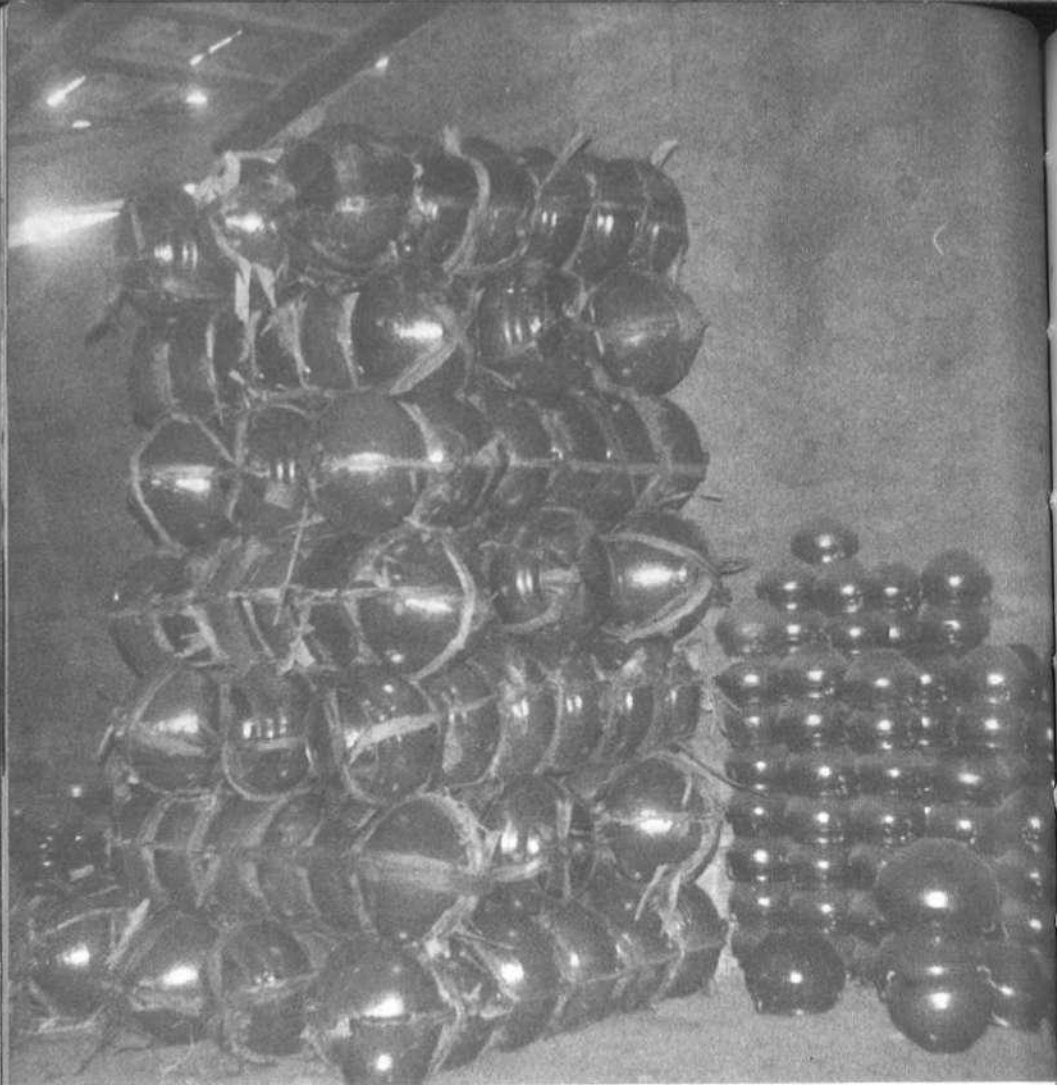
Pileta and mill for preparing the oxides.



Submerging a piece in the *vidriaderos*.



The kiln.



Stored pieces for distribution in the market.