

SECULARIZATION AND THE CULT OF HOUSEHOLD SHRINES AMONG THE OTOMI INDIANS OF SAN PEDRO ARRIBA, TEMOAYA, MEXICO

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The main object of this article is to present a general description of the cult of household shrines among the Otomi Indians of the Community of San Pedro Arriba in the municipio of Temoaya in the state of Mexico. Nearly 50 years ago Soustelle (1935) described this then generalized component of the folk religion among the Otomi and Mazahua Indians of central Mexico. Until 1965, secularization proceeded slowly among the Otomi Indians of the state of Mexico. During the past 15 years, however, the impact of modernization has seriously accelerated the process of secularization. The cult of household shrines was universal in San Pedro Arriba 20 years ago, but today less than 60% of the households continue to

practice the cult. I shall analyze the survival of this religious phenomenon and the process of modernization and secularization which has accompanied it. In passing, I shall isolate some of the syncretic and acculturative components that have traditionally kept the cult of household shrines as an important aspect of the local religion, even though in the context of the rapid culture change that the community has experienced during the past decade, the cult may become a ritual and economic liability.

An Outline of Local Culture and Society

San Pedro Arriba is one of the mine settlements (*agencias municipales*) into which the *municipio* of Temoaya is divided. It has an area of eighteen and a half square kilometers, including house sites and all cultivated and mountainous land. Administratively, the community is divided into three sections, represented in the village council by a *delegado* (councilman). Each section consists of a number of hills known by specific names and associated with the households of particular family groups. The division into sections has not only political and administrative functions, but also religious and economic functions. The sections are highly endogamous and each one of them is composed of a number of family groups bearing the same surname. Within the section, the people consider themselves related, although they are not always able to verbalize or establish specific kinship relationships. Specifically, the main functions of the sections are tax collection, the organization of political activities, social and economic cooperation for significant events in the life cycle, labor exchange and the organization of communal farming activities, and generally cooperation and exchange for a number of sacred and secular events throughout the year. Thus, the section in San Pedro Arriba is the most significant unit beyond the wider aspects of kinship.

According to the 1970 census (IX Censo General de Población, 1973), San Pedro Arriba had a population of 3550 inhabitants. The population today is only slightly higher, and this contrasts significantly with the rapid demographic growth during the period 1940-1970. The main reason for this is not any significant change in traditional birth patterns, but, rather, it reflects increasing permanent migration to the city. The center of the community has a nucleated settlement pattern, where all public buildings are located: church,

agencia municipal, police station, primary school, and health center. The houses in the center are constructed next to each other, and the overall pattern is fairly urbanized. As one moves away from the nucleated center, the settlement pattern becomes semi-nucleated, and the houses are located apart from one another, often in the middle of cultivated fields (*milpas*). On the fringes of the community the houses are quite isolated, often a hundred or two hundred yards apart. San Pedro Arriba is connected by dirt roads to Temoaya (the municipal headtown) five kilometers away and to the main highway to Toluca 20 kilometers away. There is a bus service connecting San Pedro Arriba to Toluca four times a day.

San Pedro Arriba has a subsistence economy based primarily on dry farming (*temporal*) agriculture and secondarily on a traditional textile craft (satches, belts, *ponchos*, sleeveless jackets, women's skirts, woolen blankets), recently modified by the introduction of Persian-style rug manufacturing. It is important to note, however, that daily and weekly labor migration to nearby cities and Mexico City, 90 kilometers away, has been a permanent feature of the community for many years, and a significant economic component for the past decade and a half. Today, village-centered labor migration accounts for probably 35% of the local economy, and it is likely to increase significantly as subsistence agriculture and the loom industry become insufficient to accommodate the exigencies of modernization. There are three types of land tenure: communal, *ejido*, and private. Of the nearly 1,500 hectares of arable land, two thirds are *ejido* and one third communal lands. There are also 250 hectares of irrigated lands, which are the most productive in the community, and they are all held in private property. Finally, *pulque* (fermented agave juice) production and various commercial activities contribute, but not significantly, to the local subsistence economy. At present, the local economy cannot possibly fulfill the increasing expectations brought about by modernization; indeed, given the demographic growth of the past 20 years, it can hardly support the present population at an adequate level of subsistence. There are only two alternatives: the rug industry must acquire the economic importance that it was supposed to have when it was introduced nearly ten years ago, or an increase in labor migration to cities and towns. It is not likely that the former will happen,¹ and labor migration will alleviate those enfranchized in the community and ease the demographic pressure only by permanent settlement in urban environments.

There are three types of domestic groups in San Pedro Arriba: nuclear family households, sometimes including attached lineal or collateral kinsmen; patrilineal and patrilocal extended family households; and individuals living alone, such as widowers or bachelors, but seldom wives or spinsters. The mean average membership of the nuclear family is 4.1 individuals, while that of the extended family is 7.8 individuals. Despite the strong patrilineal bias in San Pedro Arriba, the nuclear family is bilateral, that is, children maintain both of their surnames. The average extended family is composed of 2.3 nuclear families. More than 50% of the population of San Pedro Arriba lives in extended family arrangements and, as such, it is more important than the nuclear family households as the basic form of the domestic group. There are basically two types of extended families: *gasto junto* (one expense budget) and *gasto aparte* (separate expense budgets). In the case of *gasto junto*, the component nuclear families pool their incomes, under the administration of the head of the household, for running the household and meeting the social and religious obligations contracted by members. In households with *gasto aparte*, each component nuclear family retains a good deal of economic independence within the extended family. Numerically speaking, extended families with *gasto junto* predominate in San Pedro Arriba, for this is a more efficient arrangement in running the household. Regardless of type, the extended family is one of the most significant social units in the life of the community. Mediating between the domestic group and the section, there are kinship groups that may be regarded as lineages, as described by Nutini (1968: 123-171) for the Tlaxcalan community of San Bernardino Contla. The lineage is exogamous, its members possess a common name, and the right to land is controlled by membership in the lineage. Finally, marriage is generally traditional, that is, it involves both civil and religious ceremonies. Free unions are rather unusual, and this is mostly due to the fact that those who are not traditionally married cannot participate fully in the religious life of the community.

The religion of San Pedro Arriba revolves around the *mayordomía* (stewardship) system and the administrative organization of the *fiscales*, which in many other Indian communities in Mesoamerica has been described as the *cargo* system or the *ayuntamiento religioso*. The system includes a number of *cargos* or officers in charge of the administration and sponsorship of a rather large number of religious celebrations throughout the year, which includes the patron

saint of the community, a number of saints, different advocations of the Virgin Mary, and manifestations of Christ. In addition to these fairly orthodox manifestations of Catholicism, the religion of San Pedro Arriba includes a number of magical elements that must be characterized as pagan. These include beliefs and practices under the following rubrics: witchcraft, sorcery, animism, tutelary mountain owners, the concepts of illness and death, and so on. These pagan components are sometimes associated to Catholic elements, but for the most part they form a separate, parallel system. In other words, while the ideology of the supernatural does not distinguish between Catholic and pagan elements, the systems are structurally discharged separately. Thus, the cult of the *tzaguas* (see below) is kept separate from the cult of the Virgin Mary, but the same fundamental beliefs, expectations, and psychological states underlie both cults. In general, the religion of the Otomi Indians of San Pedro Arriba may be characterized as a combination of Catholic and pagan elements, many of which are undoubtedly of pre-Hispanic origin. Thus, the supernatural beliefs and practices of San Pedro Arriba must be characterized as a folk type of religion, which deviates significantly from Mexican urban Catholicism. The religious ideology of the community seems to lean significantly toward the pagan component of this syncretic situation. Moreover, there is no doubt that the religion of the Otomi Indians of the region — which even today maintains a high degree of traditionalism, despite the strong secularizing tendencies from the outside world — represents a syncretic development that has not been studied. This is a difficult task, for the Otomi are a classic example of an indigenous population in Mesoamerica — marginal in pre-Hispanic times, and marginal today — which rejects the outside world and withdraws as much as the pluriethnic situation permits it, in order to diminish exploitation by the dominant groups (Cervantes 1978).

The Syncretic and Private Dimensions of the Cult of Household Shrines

The cult of shrines associated with particular supernaturals, animistic objects, anthropomorphic deities, sacred places, and so on, is generally of importance in the ritual and ceremonial life of primitive and folk religions. Quite often the cult of shrines is associated with local supernaturals which are not part of state religions

or it may involve a syncretization of local, folk elements and a greater religious tradition. For example, this is the case with the cult of *huacas* (shrines in Quechua) in the Inca Empire (Rowe 1946: 295-297), which had local importance as places of worship, but were not part of the imperial religion. The cult of household shrines among the Otomi and Mazahua Indians in the state of Mexico (Soustelle 1935: 97-117) is one of the main components of community folk religion and it represents a syncretic development that goes back to the time of the Conquest. The Catholic elements of this syncretic situation are easy to ascertain, but not its pre-Hispanic, pagan components. We do not know with certainty the pre-Hispanic elements that went into the structuring of the original syncretic matrix or the amalgamation of Catholic elements that determined the developmental cycle of the syncretic process for the Colonial period (Nutini 1976). The cult of household shrines among the Otomi and Mazahua Indians, in the form described by Soustelle (1935), probably crystallized by the turn of the XVIII century, but we do not know how this came about in the period intervening since the Conquest.² These are important historical considerations, but for my purposes they are of peripheral significance. Thus, after placing the cult of household shrines in syncretic and acculturative perspective, I shall limit myself entirely to the contemporary situation and use this aspect of the religious organization of San Pedro Arriba in order to exemplify the processes of modernization and secularization that the community been undergoing for more than 50 years.

The heart of Mesoamerican Indian religion is a pragmatic, ritualistic, and ceremonialistic complex centered on the cult of Catholic saints. This is a syncretic complex which varies from region to region — and sometimes from community to community — and acquires particular emphases, which are usually the result of differential historical processes and conditions: pre-Hispanic components, the mechanics of conversion and catechization, degree of marginality, and so on. What generally remains constant on the Catholic side of the syncretic process is the emphasis of those first in charge of conversion and catechization (mostly friars from shortly after the Conquest to the middle of the XVII century) and later those in charge of the continuing indoctrination of the Indians (mostly secular priests from the middle of the XVII century to the end of the XVIII century) on the cult of Catholic supernaturals — including the saints, the many advocations of the Virgin Mary, and

the different manifestations of Christ — and the administrative structure associated with them (the *cargo* system). Mesoamerican Indian religion, as anthropologists have described it for the past 50 years, has remained rather constant since the beginning of the XIX century. Since the Second World War, however, the religion of the average Indian community has been subjected to strong modernizing and secularizing forces from the outside world and, while in most communities religion, on the whole, remains traditional, it is beginning to change at a pace never before experienced. Changes are most noticeable in the organization and administration of *cargo* offices and activities, but the ideology of the system and most of its basic principles remain pretty much the same. The internalization of ritual and ceremonial elements from the outside, together with the fact that the average villager is beginning to economize time and to maximize individual goals at the expense of group and communal goals, has produced some significant changes in religious functions and activities, but the basic structure of religion remains stable: it is still the conservative core of community life and the most significant force contributing to community integration. Religion remains centered on the cult of the saints and the social and public life of the community revolves around the innumerable rites and ceremonies of the yearly cycle. Thus, the strength of the cult of the saints has traditional elements of socioreligious control as well as secular, recreational elements which reinforce each other in making folk religion the conservative core of local culture and society.

In San Pedro Arriba the *mayordomía* system is the central institution in the religious life of the people. This is, of course, the norm in Mesoamerican Indian communities, but the cult of household shrines in San Pedro Arriba — and in most Otomi and Mazahua communities in the state of Mexico — makes the discharge of the functions and activities of religion somewhat different from the norm. In San Pedro Arriba there is a mild dichotomy in the cult of the saints: the *mayordomía* system encompasses the public-communal domain of functions and activities, while the cult of household shrines stands for the private-individual aspects of ritual and ceremonialism. Lest I be misunderstood, the private and public aspects of worship are present in all Mesoamerican Indian and Mestizo communities, but not in the rather structured fashion that occurs in San Pedro Arriba. For example, family altars, where images and pictures of the most venerated saints are kept, are universal in Mesoamerica, together with various kinds of household

rituals and ceremonials involving restricted kinsmen. The cult of household shrines in San Pedro Arriba, however, demarcates clearly the domains of private-individual (family) and public-communal (section, village) functions and activities. Thus, the public-communal discharge of religion, usually involving entire sections and not infrequently the whole community, is centered on the church and atrium, while the private-individual discharge of religion, involving residents of the domestic group and occasionally large numbers of kinsmen, is centered on the household shrine.

Does this dichotomy between the private and public domains of religion make any difference in the organization of rites and ceremonies and the discharge of functions and activities? First, the cult of household shrines has created a complex of ritual and ceremonial activities which are carried on quite independently of the public-communal complex and involving officiants not connected to the latter, such as *mayordomos*, *fiscales*, and other *cargo* holders elected by the community. Second, it allows household members, and other personnel attached to the domestic group, a significant degree of ritual and ceremonial self-expression, that is, based on the traditional patterns of saint sponsorship. Third, the cult of household shrines permits the discharge of non-Catholic rites and ceremonies that could not easily be accommodated within the context of public-communal, church-centered sponsorship. Given the rather generalized ideology in Mesoamerica of keeping pagan and Catholic sponsorship and propitiation separate, the cult of household shrines provides the people of San Pedro Arriba with an alternative for integrating into a single complex diverse elements that are underlain by a unitary belief system, but which cannot overtly be expressed in the public domain. Thus, I construe the origin of household shrines as a formalization of pagan survivals — to which the people have historically attached ritual and ceremonial importance — which cannot be acted out in church with the approval of the resident priest. It should be realized, of course, that the cult of household shrines among the Otomi and Mazahua Indians of the state of Mexico is only one of several solutions that have been developed historically by Mesoamerican Indians in order to provide a measure of unity to the disparate elements which make up their syncretic religion. It is in this context that the cult of household shrines in San Pedro Arriba has survived, although the cult is now beginning to disappear under conditions of rapid change.

The Cult of Household Shrines in San Pedro Arriba

Household shrines are small structures built next to the house, within the perimeter of the family compound (*solar*), seldom more than five meters apart. The shrine is a low, rectangular construction measuring 2.0 meters long by 1.5 wide and 1.8 high. There are slightly bigger shrines but with the same proportions. The shrine is made of plastered *adobe* (mud brick) walls on a stone foundation; it has a gabled tile roof, and the floor is either packed earth or covered with bricks. The front of the shrine is a porch, slightly narrower than the total width of the structure, and supported by a railing with two 60-centimeter wooden columns, reminiscent of Tarascan Indian houses in the state of Michoacán. The porch is open and provides access to the shrine through a doorless entrance. The shrine is surrounded by evergreens, wild sage, Spanish broom, red roses, and clove. In the back of the shrine's main enclosure is an *adobe* altar in the form of a three-tiered platform. The images of the saints and idols are placed on the top rung, while the other two are reserved for the flowers, fruit, beverages, and food periodically offered to them. Not infrequently, niches are carved out of the shrine's side walls, where images of saints and idols may also be placed. The images of the saints are decorated with diadems made of artificial flowers of rice, crepe paper and aluminum foil of many colors. The niches are painted blue, red, and dark green, while the inside walls of the shrine are whitewashed and adorned with bright colored paintings depicting flowers, birds, animals and, occasionally, zoomorphic designs. The more elaborate shrines are profusely decorated with polychrome rectilinear and curvilinear friezes around the walls, entrance, and porch of the shrine.

Today, between 50 and 60% of the households in San Pedro Arriba still adhere to the traditional cult of the shrines, while as late as 1960 this was a universal practice. After the customary two to five year period of patrilocal residence, married couples establish their new residence near the ancestral household and in a number of cases — most notably involving the *xocoyote* (ultimogenit) — patrilocal residence is continued until the death of the head of the household. Three or four years after residing neolocally, the nuclear family generally decides to build the household shrine. Quite often, however, newly established nuclear family households continue to participate in the cult of the household shrine from which they separated. At no time, then, were there as many shrines as there were

households in San Pedro Arriba; the proportion has been more or less constant at about one to two. What has happened since 1960 is that only a handful of new shrines have been constructed, and the majority of nuclear family households that have come into existence since then have *de facto* ceased to participate in the cult of the ancestral households from which they separated. Household personnel which have ceased to be an intrinsic part of a particular shrine do participate occasionally, but their participation is minimal and exhibits the changing ideological perspective. Before I analyze this change and try to explain it, I shall describe the traditional organization of the cult of the household shrine.

Once plans have been made for the construction of a shrine, the head of the household, with the consent of his wife, must select a sponsoring couple (*padrinos*) for setting the foundations of the structure, thereby becoming *compadres* (ritual kinsmen). This *compadrazgo* type is known locally as *primera piedra* (setting the foundations of a building structure). The establishment of the *compadrazgo* relationship is accompanied by a rather elaborate complex of ceremonies involving the *pedimento* (asking for the sponsorship), exchange of gifts (fruit, liquor, bread), and acceptance. These ceremonies are sanctioned by custom and tradition, and they are part of the *compadrazgo* system of the community, second in importance only to kinship in the fabric of the culture and society of San Pedro Arriba. The ceremony of setting the foundations of the shrine generally occurs on Saturday or Sunday, and it takes place in the late afternoon. A wooden cross is prepared by the *padrinos*, usually painted blue and decorated with ribbons. The *padrinos* and their retinue³ are greeted with fireworks and the guests anointed with *copal* (pine resin) incense. The *padrinos* proceed to set the first stone, followed immediately by planting the cross on the ground where the entrance of the shrine will be located. In the area where the altar of the shrine will be constructed, the *padrinos* place a container of holy water, wax blessed on Easter Sunday, and a few silver coins, which after a short time they bury in the ground while the participants pray in Spanish and Otomi and ask protection and good luck for all those who will be connected with the shrine. This rite of propitiation lasts about an hour and it is directed to both the saints and pagan supernaturals. The ground is then sprinkled with holy water and the ceremony comes to an end. (The proceedings are conducted by a prayer leader (*responsero*) who chants responses, leads the hymns and prayers, sprinkles the holy water,

and orchestrates the movement of attendants. From beginning to end, the ceremony is accompanied by rockets and fireworks). Neighbors, *compadres*, and friends who have been invited for the occasion proceed to give sugar cakes in the shape of stars, doves, and crosses to the *padrinos* and owners of the shrine. This signals the beginning of the secular celebration, which generally consists of a meal accompanied by plenty of liquor for the entire company. In most cases music is provided by the *padrinos* and there is dancing for a few hours.

The construction of the shrine is completed quickly and after two or three months it is usually finished. The head of the household must inform his *primera piedra compadres* at least two weeks prior to the date when the shrine will be consecrated, so that they will have plenty of time to prepare. Four days before the consecration, the members of the household must decorate the shrine and prepare for this important event. The inside of the shrine is decorated with flowers, garlands, and *papier-mâché* decorations. The porch and sometimes the outside walls are decorated with mats made of agave fiber woven with lilies. An archway made of the same mats is constructed in front of the shrine and it is decorated with bitter oranges, lemons, and wafers made of flowers and vegetable dyes of many colors, usually purple, crimson, white, and pink. A passageway roughly five meters long is made with arches covered with agave mats and decorated with multicolored rice paper flags. The preparation of the food and drink that will be consumed at the banquet following the consecration of the shrine takes up most of the time during the next three days.

The day before the consecration everything must be ready and the last touches grace the decoration. Early that day, prayers and a memorial mass for the souls of the dead are said in the local church, sponsored by the head of the household and attended by the *padrinos* and many neighbors, *compadres*, and friends. This is a day of prayer, work, and fasting for the entire family, and not infrequently neighbors and friends come to participate. At night bonfires are lit in front of the shrine, there is a display of fireworks, and rockets are set off at regular intervals. Near midnight, a most important event takes place: taking the *tzaguas* to a cave in a nearby mountain.

The *tzaguas* are clay figurines of natural color, or sometimes painted red, crimson, green, and purple. They vary in size from 15 to 30 centimeters; they represent humans in various forms: warriors, people on horseback, god-like personages, musicians, dancers,

women making tortillas, and so on. Not infrequently, the *tzaguas* are zoomorphic figures of bulls, horses, goats, and cats. The *tzaguas* are slightly concave, the front part of which are realistic representations of human and animal forms, while the backs are formless. They are made by two artisans in one of the communities in the municipio of Temoaya. The people of San Pedro Arriba in particular, and the Otomi Indians of the state of Mexico in general, are very secretive about the *tzaguas*, and as far as I know, they have not been reported in the ethnographic literature (see Manrique 1969: 716-717). The following information regarding the nature of the *tzaguas* is what I have been able to obtain from a few informants; it is not complete, but it is enough to understand the basic structure of these pagan supernaturals. The *tzaguas* are the representation of the spirits of the dead, the owners of the mountains and the supernaturals associated with several stars and heavenly bodies. They are essentially household deities and guardian spirits, not unlike the *lares* and *penates* of the ancient Romans. But why and how the *tzaguas* are now undifferentiated from anthropomorphic supernaturals, tutelary mountain owners, and celestial deities is impossible to determine. There is no doubt that in pre-Hispanic times, and probably well into Colonial times, the Otomi Indians placed these various kinds of supernaturals in clearly delineated domains. There is nothing that I can say about these matters at the moment, but some answers may be forthcoming when the syncretic development of Otomi religion has been studied. In any event, the *tzaguas* are supernaturals that are the object of protection, propitiation, and intensification by the people of San Pedro Arriba. The rites and ceremonies associated with their cult involves the same religious attitudes and psychological behavior patterns as those associated with the cult of Catholic saints.

It is the duty of the *padrinos* to buy a number of *tzaguas* for the consecration of the shrine. They may be from five to ten, and the size and form of the figurines is left up to the household head and his wife, with whom the *padrinos* must consult before acquiring the *tzaguas*. On the evening of the fourth day before the consecration, the *padrinos* bring the *tzaguas* to the shrine and place them on the altar, decorated as if they were images or pictures of saints. This event attracts a number of neighbors and friends, and it is again presided by the *responsero* who officiated for the occasion of setting the foundations of the shrine. The *responsero* takes the *tzaguas* from the *padrinos*, hands them over to the head of the household

and his wife, and then one by one lifts them to the sky in the direction of the morning star and reverently places them on the altar. The *responsero* lights several *veladoras* (short and thick candles), places them at the bottom of the altar, and leads the congregation assembled in a semi-circle in front of the shrine in prayers and chanting. This is a rite of propitiation, and as domestic protectors, the *tzaguas* are asked by the *responsero* to watch over the physical and spiritual well-being of the members of the household. To conclude the proceedings, *atole* (corn gruel drink) and *tamales* (corn dumplings) are served to the company.

The *tzaguas* stay in the shrine for the next three days, until the time they are taken to the mountain. During this time, members of the household take turns at praying and standing guard at the shrine, making sure that *veladoras* are always lit. At dusk, on the evening of the day before the consecration, neighbors, *compadres*, and friends begin to congregate. People bring flowers, which they place on the floor of the shrine and pray individually to the *tzaguas*. Promptly at midnight, the *responsero* once more invokes the protection of the *tzaguas* on behalf of the household members in the presence of the company, which may number as many as 50 or 60 people. Then he takes the *tzaguas* from the altar and hands them to the *padrinos* and the head of the household and his wife, who will carry them to their final destination. A procession is organized as they set off for the Cerro de la Catedral, four kilometers away. The way is illuminated by people carrying pine-branch torches and particular individuals are designated to carry flowers, food, and drink for the *tzaguas*. As the procession meanders up the slope, the people chant litanies in Otomi led by the *responsero*.

The Cerro de la Catedral is a fairly high mountain with many natural caves on its mid-slopes. Beforehand, the *padrinos* choose one of the caves to serve as the resting place for the *tzaguas*. Early that day the *padrinos* place a bandaged *tzagua* inside an old pot at the bottom of the cave where the *tzaguas* will be placed. The bandaged *tzagua* represents a sick person and symbolizes one of the most important functions of these pagan supernaturals, namely, to care for the health of household members. Upon arriving at the cave, only the *responsero*, *padrinos*, and members of the household are allowed to go in; the rest of the company waits outside. The *responsero* arranges the *tzaguas* around the bandaged figurine in the pot so as to simulate either a party of people performing a particular task or a pack of animals. The baskets of flowers, food, and drink are

brought into the cave and placed around the arrangement of *tzaguas*. Then, led by the *responsero*, the people inside the cave invoke in Otomi, for the third time, the protection and good offices of the *tzaguas*, emphasizing the prevention of illness, the generation of happiness, and the prevention of diaster befalling the members of the household. As the people file out of the cave, leaving the *tzaguas* with a lit *veladora*, the *padrinos* « seal » the entrance with a couple of clay statue of horsemen with drawn swords, representing either Saint James the Apostle or Saint Michael the Archangel. The statues are generally 30 to 40 centimeters tall, bought by the *padrinos* from the *tzagua* makers, and brought to the cave by the children of the household. From the moment the cave is sealed, no one may touch the *tzaguas* at the risk of contracting *mal aire* (bad air, evil wind).⁴ The return to the household shrine is more or less timed to take place between two to three in the morning, when *Nde-Tze* (Venus, the morning star) and *Ranojo-Tze* (Sirius, the great star) are high in the sky.

Many months or years may pass before those associated with a particular shrine visit the *tzaguas*. By then, of course, the flowers and baskets of food and drink will have rotten, but the *tzaguas* are most likely to be undisturbed, even though other sets of *tzaguas* may have been placed in the cave. However, when serious illness or disaster strikes the household or any individual associated with it, the *tzaguas* are propitiated and asked to intervene. *Ofrendas* (ritual offerings of flowers, sweet bread, and liquor) are taken to them in the caves, and with the intervention of a *responsero* the people may chant and pray for an entire evening. In the rites and ceremonies performed in the shrine throughout the year, the *tzaguas* are always remembered, and special *veladoras* are occasionally lit in their honor. The cult of the *tzaguas* is essentially the same as the cult of the saints and the people of San Pedro Arriba often commend themselves to the *tzaguas* in the same fashion they commend themselves to the saints. Whatever structural distinctions may exist in the respective cults, the same attitudes and expectations obtain.

It is usually three o'clock in the morning when the company silently returns to the house. A special dance is organized by the children of the household accompanied by children from nearby households and frequently by the children of *compadres* of the shrine's owners. The children, dressed as angels, dance in front of the shrine chanting religious songs. Meanwhile, inside the house the

responsero blesses the crosses, images, and pictures of saints that will be placed in the shrine the following evening. He also blesses a container of water out of which all attendants must drink before the ceremony is over. Then the *responsero* proceeds to the ritual cleansing of the house and shrine in order to « exorcise the devil », thereby rendering the entire household clean for the events to come. He does this by brushing the walls, ceilings, floors, and furniture in the house and the shrine itself with a bundle made of several tree branches, which he keeps with him and which, within three days, he must bury in the cave of the *tzaguas*. The head of the household and his wife hand the crosses, images, and pictures of the saints to the *padrinos*, which they take home and keep with them until they are finally placed in the shrine. Before the company retires, *atole*, coffee, sweet bread, and *tamales* are served.

The saints and different advocations of the Virgin and Christ that will be placed in the shrine vary from household to household, depending primarily on the particular devotions of the adults who will be drawn into the cult of the shrine. The patron saint of the adults is always chosen by the household head and his wife, and it may be one of many devotions popular in San Pedro Arriba. The patron saint occupies the place of honor in the middle of the altar, surrounded by the images and pictures of other Catholic supernaturals and placed in order of importance or particular devotion that shrine worshippers attach to them. The most common Catholic supernaturals worshipped in the household shrines of San Pedro Arriba are the following: La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Virgen de los Remedios, La Virgen de la Soledad, La Virgen de la Luz, La Virgen del Carmen; El Señor de Chalma, El Señor de las Maravillas, El Divino Rostro, el Señor del Convento; San Martín de Porres, San Pedro y San Pablo, San Juan de los Lagos, San José, San Antonio de Padua, Santiago Apostol, San Miguel Arcangel; Las Benditas Animas del Purgatorio. The number of images and pictures per shrine varies from five to 15, and pictures are more common than images (*santos de bulto*). Most shrines in San Pedro Arriba contain wooden crosses hanging from the walls or standing on the floor against the wall. These are usually ceremonial crosses which the people have saved from *compadrazgo* relationships having to do with death (erection of a burial cross), blessing of a new house, building, or field, all of which involve the erection of a cross. After the crosses are believed to have performed their symbolic, propitiatory objectives, they are entrusted to those who ask for the *com-*

padrazgo relationship until eventually they are placed in the shrine. These crosses are much venerated as possessing inherent elements of protection and good fortune for those who ritually care for them.

The consecration of the shrine takes place in the late afternoon or early evening. This event always attracts a large number of neighbors, *compadres*, and friends, who are organized by the *responsero* to receive the saints. When the noise of the rockets announces the approach of the *padrinos'* entourage, the company rushes forward forming two lines extending to the outer perimeter of the *solar*, where the head of the household and his wife affectionately greet the *padrinos*. Household members decorate the *padrinos* and his principal attendants with wreaths of marigold and sugar cakes and then the *padrinos* do the same to the head of the household, his wife, and kinsmen associated with the shrine. Standing at the edge of the *solar* the company proceeds to welcome the saints carried by the *padrinos* and their attendants. Led by the head of the household, the people file before the saints, kneeling, making the sign of the cross, and kissing each of them. The images and pictures of the saints are decorated with wild flowers, fruit, and sugar cakes. When in season, they may also be decorated with squash, corn, and sugar cane, to such an extent that the images and pictures are almost totally covered with these offerings.

The *responsero* sprinkles the saints with holy water, and while the people sing, the entourage makes its way into the *solar*. In front of the shrine, which holds only two or three people, the *responsero* sprinkles the *padrinos* with holy water and proceeds to place the saints in the shrine. The images and pictures are handed by the *padrinos* to the head of the household and his wife who, in turn, give them to the *responsero*, who places them in the prescribed order on the top rung of the altar. The decorations of the saints are placed on the second rung, while the *ofrenda* — consisting of earthenware pots containing a chocolate drink made of chocolate, water, and bread and covered with bananas — is placed on the third rung. On the third rung are also placed plates of the food that will be eaten by the company afterwards, so that the saints are the first to participate in the ceremonial meal. Thus, the chocolate drink and the food placed before the saints must be boiling hot. The final offering to the saints consists of two boiled and dressed pigeons placed at each side of the foot of the altar, flanked by two *veladoras*, which are lit.

While the enshrining of the saints is taking place, the attendants

and quests congregate in front of the shrine to sing and pray. The *responsero* emerges from the shrine and leads the company in a long string of responses in which the protection of the saints and the *tzaguas* is invoked on behalf of those who will be connected with the shrine; these responses emphasize the physical, spiritual, and economic well-being of all concerned. Then the emphasis of the responses shifts to the wellbeing of the assembled company and the community as a whole. Once the rites of supplication are over, the *padrinos* signal the beginning of the dance, which takes place in the courtyard of the shrine with the accompaniment of an ensemble of two violins, triangle, and bass drum. The dancing goes on for an hour or so, until it is time for the ceremonial banquet, served to the principal actors of the ceremony in the main room of the house, while the company at large is served in the courtyard. By then, the people reason, the saints are happy and they can now enjoy themselves. The main room of the house is decorated with garlands and a lighted candle on top of several *pulque* barrels on one of the corners. The *padrino* blesses the *pulque*, drinks a cup, and serves the principal actors, who in turn serve the assembled guests. The ceremonial banquet gets under way and the drinking goes on until the following day.

After the shrine is consecrated, it becomes the focal point of the ritual and ceremonial activities of the household, which involve numerous events in the life cycle and the yearly religious cycle. The *padrinos* are permanently tied to the shrine and must participate in all important events centered on it. When the *padrinos* die, they must be replaced by descendants, usually a married son, or a collateral couple of kinsmen in the absence of lineal descendants. If this responsibility is not fulfilled, the entire family of the *padrinos* risks the danger of the saints and *tzaguas*, which may punish individual members of the family with illness, bad luck, and even death. Throughout the year, the *padrinos* are required to be present and help to celebrate or propitiate on the following occasions: the anniversary of the shrine's consecration, Easter Sunday, Christmas day, and when a member of the group associated with the shrine becomes seriously ill. The *padrinos* are very punctilious about complying with these obligations, so much so that they may also attend most of the shrine-centered events at which they are not required to be present. The mere presence of the *padrinos* on these various occasions is enough to comply with the necessary rapport and supplication demanded by the saints, but the *padrinos* always go beyond

and contribute flowers, fruit, food and, occasionally, they provide the music that many of the events require. Whenever members of the household or individuals tied to the shrine decide to add a new saint to the cult, the *padrinos* must play the principal role in the proceedings.

Every social, religious and, sometimes, economic event of importance in the household, or affecting those attached to it, involves the worship or propitiation of the saints housed in the shrine. The most common events are the following: baptisms, weddings, deaths, first communions, ritual cleansings, presenting children with a scapulary, blessings of new objects, establishment of new *compadrazgo* relationships, elections or nominations for *cargo* offices, and so on. It is beyond the scope of this article to describe and analyze the rites and ceremonies associated with these numerous occasions, but we can generalize to the effect that they are variations of the basic rites and ceremonies described above. Each occasion has elements of its own, which vary, of course, with the propitiatory, protective, intensifying, or thanksgiving nature of the event. But the general organization of personnel, the flow of rites and ceremonies, the movement of people, and the psychological state of participants for all occasions is virtually the same as described for the consecration of the shrine.

The shrine is a place of rejoicing and prayer, of propitiation and intensification, of protection and thanksgiving. It houses the saints, the most precious possessions of the people of San Pedro Arriba, and it serves as a place where the *tzaguas* are remembered and occasionally worshipped. In essence, the household shrine is the focal point of the ritual and ceremonial life of the family; together with the local church and its *cargo* system, they constitute the fundamental axis of communal religion. The images and pictures of the saints are the most sacred possessions of the household; they cannot be touched except by those tied by the cult of the shrine, the *padrinos*, and the *responsero* who consecrated the shrine. This explains the small size of shrines and the fact that no one is admitted inside, except those mentioned above. Neighbors and friends may bring flowers or fruit to the saints in the shrines, but only those who are allowed to touch them may place these offerings before the altar.

Finally, a word about illness and the cult of household shrines. As I have indicated, *mal aire* in San Pedro Arriba is believed to cause disturbances, the different symptoms of which are regarded as

psychic illnesses. The most common symptoms of *mal aire* are nausea, vomiting, strong head-aches, sweating, and loss of memory. When *mal aire* strikes, a local *curandera* is summoned to cure the patient. She usually administers a boiled potion made of camomile or anise, alcohol, and water. After heavy sweating, the *curandera* cleanses the patient behind the ears with a bundle of herbs, covers his head with a handkerchief and puts him to sleep. She then places the bundle at the nearest crossroads and returns to the house of the patient, walking backwards with her eyes fixed intensely on the bundle, so as to ward off the *mal aire*. The next day, the patient is supposed to be cured. If he is not, a *limpia* (ritual cleansing) must be performed by the *curandera* in front of the shrine. If this is not effective, the *tzaguas* are invoked as a last resort and another *limpia* must be performed in the cave by the *responsero* who placed them there. When a member of the household or anybody associated with it gets sick, it is thought that the saints are annoyed. It is then required that the shrine be redecorated and, most important, that one of the crosses inside the shrine be destroyed and buried on the spot by the children of the household wearing crowns of flowers. The patron saint of the shrine, always an image, must be repainted, otherwise the patient will die. When all this is done, the patient is supposed to get well; if not, a *limpia* must be performed on him inside the shrine by the *responsero* who consecrated it.

Modernization and Secularization: The Changing Context of the Cult of Household Shrines

In the foregoing sections I described the syncretic composition of the cult of household shrines, the structural reasons for its persistence, and the traditional functions and activities of the cult as a counterpart to the public-communal dimensions of religion in San Pedro Arriba. I have also indicated that this institution has been changing for 20 years and that it will eventually disappear in the form that I have described. I shall now try to explain why and under what conditions the cult of household shrines has changed and will continue to change, until it survives in a significantly different context. The culture change that San Pedro Arriba has been experiencing at an increasing pace since 1965 can be explained best by the concepts of modernization and secularization as developed by Nutini and Isaac (1974), as these concepts are most effective

in explaining the kinds of changes in religious behavior with which we are concerned here.

At the outset, it is important to distinguish clearly between the processes of modernization and secularization. The distinction is particularly important in dealing with the pluriethnic societies composing the different regions of Mesoamerica, which are subjected to constant pressures and influences from the national culture. Modernization may be regarded as the direct influence of the national, urban culture on the culture of the local, folk community. This process takes place primarily in the domain of material culture and subsistence patterns, but which by itself and throughout short periods of time does not affect the transformation of other domains of the local culture. By secularization, Nutini and Isaac denote that special class of changes that tend to transform the basic institutions of the community. That is, there is a reaction against external forces and pressures that redound in the breakdown and disorganization of the traditional institutions of the community. They go on to say that: « In this conceptualization of sociocultural change, the syntagmatic process is as follows: Modernization by itself may leave the community basically unchanged in its traditional structure and for relatively long periods of time. After a prolonged and continued period of exposure, the cumulative effect of modernization initiates the process of secularization. In turn, the process of secularization throws traditional institutions into a state of disarray, not only because of the cumulative effect of particular modernizing elements, but perhaps more importantly, due to the reaction of the traditional structure of the community to direct pressures from the outside. Finally, when the process of secularization is well entrenched, it creates a new ideology that radically reorganizes the traditional structure of the community » (Nutini and Isaac 1974: 369-370).

The conceptualization of sociocultural change developed by Nutini and Isaac for the Sierra de Puebla and the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley is applicable to many regions of Mesoamerica, especially to the region inhabited by the Otomi and Mazahua Indians in the state of Mexico, which has had prolonged and continuous contact with urban settings. Given this methodological focus, it is easy to understand why many communities appear to be changing rapidly, but they are really still essentially traditional, that is, they are communities that are undergoing modernization but the process of secularization has not been yet fully established. It is of the utmost importance in such communities in transition to establish

what kinds of changes are proceeding at a rapid pace, for it is otherwise meaningless to speak in terms of modernization and secularization. Thus, in the Otomi and Mazahua region of the state of Mexico there are many communities with a material culture and economy at a rather high level of modernization, but in which the *cargo* system, the cult of the saints, a fairly strong pagan-folk complex, and a well-structured kinship and ritual kinship system remain the traditional, conservative core of community culture and society. In their conceptualization of sociocultural change, Nutini and Isaac emphasize two crucial points. First, the most important factor which triggers the modernization-secularization process is economic, and not any reified attribute of the traditional social structure, such as Foster (1965) maintains with his notion of the « image of limited good ». As they put it, « Communities remain traditional and adhere to socioreligious patterns of behavior not by the grace of God or because they possess innate traditional properties, but because the economic situation requires it. When a community is presented with a true economic alternative, traditionalism tends to disappear quickly » (Nutini and Isaac 1974: 371). Second, the economic matrix of change is always underlain by internal and external variables to the community, which are a necessary condition to establish, in order to explain the onset of modernization, the passage of modernization to secularization and the creation of a new ideological-structural setting.

Secularization involves a conscious deviation from traditional Indian customs and practices and the increasing influence of social, economic, and religious elements of urban-Mestizo origin in the organization of communal life. The process is triggered by a series of essentially economic variables and its final result is the creation of of essentially economic variables and its final result is the creation of a new ideology which tends to maximize secular, individual goals at the expense of sacred, communal goals. The process of secularization is best expressed in an increasing openness of the community, and the tendency to adopt external elements and innovations and adapt them to the local culture and society. The adoption of new urban-Mestizo elements is always selective and their adaptation to the communal context may greatly modify their original form and content. Thus, most transitional communities in Mesoamerica undergoing secularization are curious combinations of social, religious, economic, political, linguistic, and symbolic elements of both traditional-Indian and urban-Mestizo origins (Nutini and Isaac

1974: 436-439). In the Otomi and Mazatua regions of the state of Mexico, for example, there are innumerable communities in which traditional elements and institutions such as witchcraft, sorcery, an elaborate and well-organized *cargo* system, and a strong kinship and ritual kinship system coexist with modern, urban elements such as a high degree of labor migration, good means of communication and transportation, and exposure to all kinds of external influences. Whether this kind of precarious equilibrium will become adaptive is not certain. We need to know much more about the processes of modernization and secularization before making definitive statements. But it is in this context that I can provide some answers to questions such as why and how the cult of household shrines in San Pedro Arriba is changing and what is likely to happen.

San Pedro Arriba was a closed corporate community with few contacts with the outside world until the late 1920s. Indeed, local culture and society probably had not changed in any significant way since the end of the XVIII, despite the numerous upheavals throughout the XIX century and the Mexican Revolution of 1910. In 1928 or so, the community slowly began to open up to the outside world, that is, the process of modernization set in. By the end of the Second World War, the community was still closed and corporate, but with a number of ties to nearby cities and towns. Labor migration became a fairly significant part of the local economy and since then it has increased steadily. After more than 30 years of modernizing influences from the national culture, the process of secularization begins in the late '50s and acquired momentum by the middle '60s. Since 1965 or so, we can describe San Pedro Arriba as a community undergoing rapid culture change, especially since 1970, when the Persian style rug industry was introduced in the community as part of the program of the federal government to develop traditional arts and crafts in the most marginal Indians regions of Mexico (Cervantes 1978: 163-180). San Pedro Arriba today is no longer closed or corporate. Rather, it is a fairly open community with many economic and socioreligious ties to urban centers. The process of secularization, however, has not been strong enough yet to change the conservative institutional core of community culture and society. In several respects, San Pedro Arriba remains traditional. This is most noticeable in the religious organization and some aspects of the kinship and ritual kinship system. Many structural changes have occurred, to be sure, but they have not been strong enough to create a new secular ideology,

thereby bringing the process of secularization to an end. In summary, San Pedro Arriba must be characterized as a community in transition, leaning already towards the secular end of the continuum. I shall venture to predict that within the next 15 years San Pedro Arriba will be well on its way to full integration into the national culture.

It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze the internal and external variables which have conditioned the process of modernization and secularization in San Pedro Arriba during the past 50 years. I shall summarize what I have done elsewhere (Cervantes 1978) to put the problem at hand in a wider perspective. Since the turn of the century, there has been a great deal of land erosion and deforestation, which have significantly diminished the traditional subsistence economy of San Pedro Arriba. In turn, the population explosion that the community has experienced since the mid-'40s — from 1950 to 1979 the population has more than doubled — has led to a serious shortage of arable land. Labor migration has increased in direct proportion to the negative effects that these variables have had on the community, which are somewhat alleviated by the Persian-style rug industry. Population growth has undoubtedly been the most determinant variable in the process of change. The birth rate has not really changed since the end of the Second World War, but what has changed rather dramatically is infant mortality. If, in 1950, four out of 10 children survived the critical age of five, in 1975 more than seven out of 10 survived. This high decrease in infant mortality is due primarily to better health care and better housing and diet. And this brings us to the external variables which have facilitated the process of change, namely, the construction of new roads, improved means of communication, which together with the introduction of the rug industry, have been the most important causes in the constant increase of labor migration. The conjunction of these variables during the past decade has produced an ambiance of change that has colored every domain of the local culture and society.

With respect to religion, many rites and ceremonies have been affected by the new economic situation. The traditional religious ideology has acquired a secular component, which may be summarized by saying that the people of San Pedro Arriba are not only beginning to capitalize in economic terms, but also to save time and channelize their ritual and ceremonial efforts selectively. For example, labor migrants returning home on week-ends or very late

every night are no longer in the position to participate effectively in the traditional rites and ceremonies. Thus, many aspects of the traditional organization of religion are disappearing. The people of San Pedro Arriba are beginning to cut corners in the discharge of the rites and ceremonies of the life cycle, even though this remains one of the strongest domains of the overall religious system. Despite these structural changes, the sacred ideology basically has not changed, and it is still strong enough to constrain the majority of people from deviating unduly from traditional patterns. Indeed, a veritable battle is being fought at the ideological level, as modernizing elements increase their cumulative effect on the social structure.

The cult of household shrines in San Pedro Arriba has been declining for nearly two decades. Between 1960 and 1970, only four or five new shrines were constructed, and none since then. Moreover, the number of nuclear families drawn into the cult has steadily decreased since labor migration acquired significant economic importance with the introduction of the rug industry. There is no question that the cult will eventually disappear in the traditional form that I have described here. How can we explain this?

First, the fact that the cult of household shrines, which constituted the private manifestation of ritualism and ceremonialism, does not form a part of the *cargo* system, and was probably the main reason for the survival and strength of the institution in traditional times. But since the onset of secularization and during the past two decades it has become a liability. In their selective participation, the people of San Pedro Arriba are no longer willing to spend the time and money to construct new shrines or to defray all the expenses connected with the cycle of events centered on the shrine. Thus, the *cargo* system and the public cult of the saints takes priority in the more limited output of money, time, and social effort than the people are willing to invest in the discharge of religious duties and obligations. The main reason for this is that public-communal sentiment can be marshalled effectively to make people comply with what is traditionally expected of them. Also, in a situation of increasing secularization, public religious participation acquires an element of prestige that it does not have in the traditional setting: individuals discharge *cargo* offices because it is their duty toward the supernaturals and the community at large, and not because they are trying to maximize influence or prestige.

Second, the cult of household shrines as a family-centered insti-

tution can be more easily manipulated and transformed than the public-communal aspects of religion centered on the church and *cargo* system. The elaboration of rites and ceremonies of the cult can be minimized and simplified so as to save money, time, and social effort without the conflict that the same would entail in the public-communal domain of religion. A household head and his family, for example, may now postpone, alter, or abolish a shrine-centered event; but if he is elected to a *cargo* office he is required to perform in the prescribed manner, and changes or deviations must involve the consensus of the community. No wonder, then, the people of San Pedro Arriba follow the line of least resistance. The cult of household shrines is disappearing in San Pedro Arriba because the people can economize money and time without unduly contravening the religious contract with the supernaturalists in the eyes of the community at large. In this context, the *cargo* system, as the core of public-communal religion, will survive longer in its traditional form.

The traditional cult of household shrines will disappear altogether probably within the next generation, as the rites and ceremonies associated with it become more and more diluted and fewer people participate. But this does not mean that the cult of the saints will also disappear. Rather, the cult of the saints will be centered on the traditional family altar, as it is found in the households of most Mesoamerican communities. The rites and ceremonies will become simpler and less expensive and time consuming, but they will retain a good deal of the propitiatory, intensifying, the thanksgiving components that they had in the shrine-centered context. The still strong pre-Hispanic component of San Pedro Arriba's religious ideology to some extent ensures the survival of the cult of the *tzaguas*. But here again, the rites and ceremonies involved in the cult of this pagan complex will be minimized and simplified. The beliefs in the *tzaguas* will no doubt diminish in importance in the daily social and religious life of the people, but they will continue to be invoked in times of crisis and extreme spiritual, physical, and economic necessity⁵. Thus, the cult of household shrines, as composed primarily by the cult of the saints and the cult of the *tzaguas*, will survive in a different context, with different structural manifestations, but underlain essentially by the same belief system. Whether this situation will become adaptive, or will reach complete secularization and therefore disappear, as a well-delineated religious domain, I would not venture to say.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this article, I have described and analyzed the cult of household shrines in the Otomi-speaking community of San Pedro Arriba in the state of Mexico. I embedded the cult in the wider context of the local folk religion, taking into consideration the syncretic components which have constituted its traditional strength and which are the main reason for its survival. I explained the changes that the cult is experiencing in terms of the concepts of modernization and secularization which have affected the community for more than 50 years. I believe this is a useful approach, which, when properly conceptualized, and within a quantitative context, may lead to a significant theory of rapid culture change. Following Nutini (1979), I have implicitly separated ideology from structure, as one of the most salient parameters in the conceptualization of change. By separating ideology from its embodiment in the structural-functional components of a system — that is, regarding ideology and structure as independent operationalizable concepts — we are better able to ascertain the efficacious variables that enter into the operationalization of change. I have not done this here, of course, but I have indicated how it can be done.

Finally, the approach to change exemplified in this article can be applied to the whole spectrum of community and regional culture and society. Indeed, it would not be very profitable to generalize for the community in isolation and, from this standpoint, most of what I have said about the cult of household shrines in San Pedro Arriba applies also to the Otomi region of the state of Mexico. How and why the cult of household shrines has changed during the past 20 years in San Pedro Arriba may be regarded as a low-level model of religious change in general for the Otomi region as a whole; a model in the sense that particular confluences of variables at the community level could explain both particular forms and the rapidity with which religious change has taken place. The operationalization of the model presented here has not only theoretical and methodological significance but immediate pragmatic implications as well. The very rapid pace that modernization and secularization has taken in most Indian regions of Mesoamerica makes it imperative that a hard, operational theory of rapid change be formulated. Otherwise, it will surely lead to disorganization

and inadequate decisions, as applied anthropology begins to influence the decision-making of politicians at the national and regional levels.

Notes

1. There is not enough demand for the rugs manufactured in the communities of the *municipio* of Temoaya. The rugs are too expensive. They cannot compete successfully with genuine Persian rugs or with the more modestly priced rugs manufactured in other regions of Mexico.

2. The ethnohistory of the Otomi and Mazahua Indians of the Central Mexican Highlands is poorly known. The work of Carrasco (1950), excellent as it is, does not say much about Otomi pre-Hispanic religion and subsequent acculturative and syncretic developments.

3. When a couple is asked to become *compadres* in San Pedro Arriba and both accept, they are allowed to invite whomever they want to the ensuing rites and ceremonies. This is quite generalized throughout Mesoamerica (Nutini 1979: 487).

4. *Mal aire* in San Pedro Arriba is not necessarily a folk illness but, rather, like in many regions of Mesoamerica, a concept postulated by the people to explain the causes of many illnesses. *Mal aire* is associated locally with the evil humors released by the head, which are supposed to trigger symptoms that may be characterized as «psychological». Thus, touching the *tzaguas* may cause a number of illnesses implying psychic disturbances.

5. Throughout the discussion of change involving modernization and secularization, I have taken for granted that there is an operational distinction between *structure* and *ideology*, and that the latter — as constituting the ideational order of a given domain — evolves or is transformed slower than the former. This viewpoint is discussed at length by Nutini (1979) in his work on *compadrazgo*.

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Summary

The main object of this article is to present a general description of the cult of household shrines among the Otomi Indians of the Community of San Pedro Arriba in the municipio of Temoaya in the state of Mexico.

The cult of household shrines was universal in San Pedro Arriba 20 years ago, but today less than 60% of the household continue to practice the cult. The author analyzes the survival of this religious phenomenon and the process of modernization and secularization which has accompanied it, and isolates some of the syncretic and acculturative components that have traditionally kept the cult of household shrines as an important aspect of the local religion, even though in the context of the rapid culture change that the community has experienced during the past decade, the cult may become a ritual and economic liability.

Sommario

L'articolo presenta una descrizione generale del culto degli altari domestici presso gli Indiani Otomi della comunità di San Pedro Arriba (Municipio di Temoaya, Stato di Messico).

Tale culto, universalmente diffuso in San Pedro Arriba sino a 20 anni fa, è oggi praticato da meno del 60% della popolazione. L'A. analizza la sopravvivenza di tale fenomeno religioso e il processo di modernizzazione e di secolarizzazione che lo ha accompagnato. L'A. isola inoltre alcune delle componenti sincretiche e acculturative che hanno consentito la conservazione del culto dei tabernacoli quale aspetto importante della religione locale, anche se nel contesto del rapido mutamento culturale sperimentato dalla comunità negli ultimi anni il culto tende a divenire un gravame economico e sociale.