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**Surface Archaeology in the Chilapa-Zitlala Area of Guerrero, México,
Season I**



Research Year: 2003

Culture: Aztec, Mixtec and Olmec

Chronology: Early Pre-Classic to Post Classic

Location: Guerrero, México

Site: Chilapa-Zitlala Area, (see [list of sites](#))

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Abstract

Planned as a three-year project, the main objective is to define a local chronology and describe the cultural materials and the settlement pattern for this area in the Lower Mountain area of the state of Guerrero. Fifty-seven sites were located during the first season (2003) ranging from very small (a few square meters) to 66 hectares. Preliminary analysis of the information recovered suggests that, except for the Early Classic, there was uninterrupted occupation of the area from the Early Formative through the Postclassic periods.

Resumen

Planeado como un proyecto a tres años, el objetivo principal es definir una cronología local y describir los materiales culturales y el patrón de asentamiento para esta área, localizada en la Montaña Baja de Guerrero. Durante esta primera temporada (2003), se localizaron 57 sitios, que abarcan desde los muy chicos, de apenas unos metros cuadrados, hasta uno de 66 hectáreas. El análisis preliminar de la información recobrada sugiere una ocupación ininterrumpida en el área desde el Formativo Temprano hasta el Posclásico, a excepción del Clásico Temprano, período que aún no queda claro.

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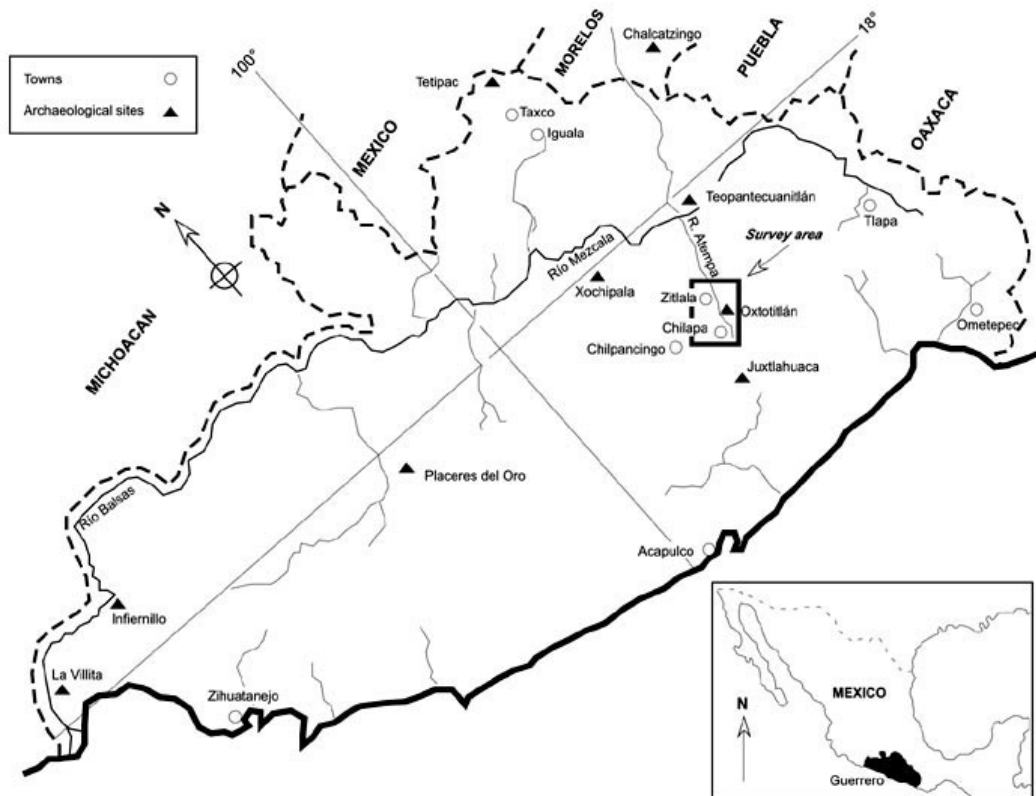


Figure 1. The state of Guerrero with the survey area.

Introduction

The idea of this project is to carry out an archaeological survey of approximately 386 km² over three field seasons (2003-2005) in the lower mountain area of Central Guerrero, along the Atempa River drainage (Figure 1, Figure 2). The main purpose is to characterize the area through its archaeological materials, establish a chronology, and analyze the settlement pattern. Compared to other parts of Guerrero, such as the Central and North subareas (Paradis and La Farge (eds.) 1999; Schmidt 1976, 1990; Schmidt and Litvak 2001), this area, east of the México City-Acapulco highway, is practically unknown except for David Grove's (1970a, 1970b) report of the Olmec paintings at Oxtotitlán (Figure 3, shown below), located in the middle of my proposed area, and one site—Taltizate—reported by Antonio Porcayo (personal communication) in a salvage project survey by INAH between Chilpancingo and Chilapa in 2001. North of the area is Teopantecuanitlán (Martínez Donjuan 1982, 1986, 1994; Niederberger 1986; Reyna 1996), and to the south is Juxtlahuaca (Gay 1967; Griffin 1982; Grove 1967). The nearest sequences are from Chilpancingo (Schmidt 1976) and Xochipala (Schmidt 1990) to the west, while to the north Chalcatzingo (Grove 1987) is the most relevant. Although some archaeological work has been done in the mountains to the east, in the area of Tlapa and Huamuxtitlán, there are still no sequences nor descriptions of materials.

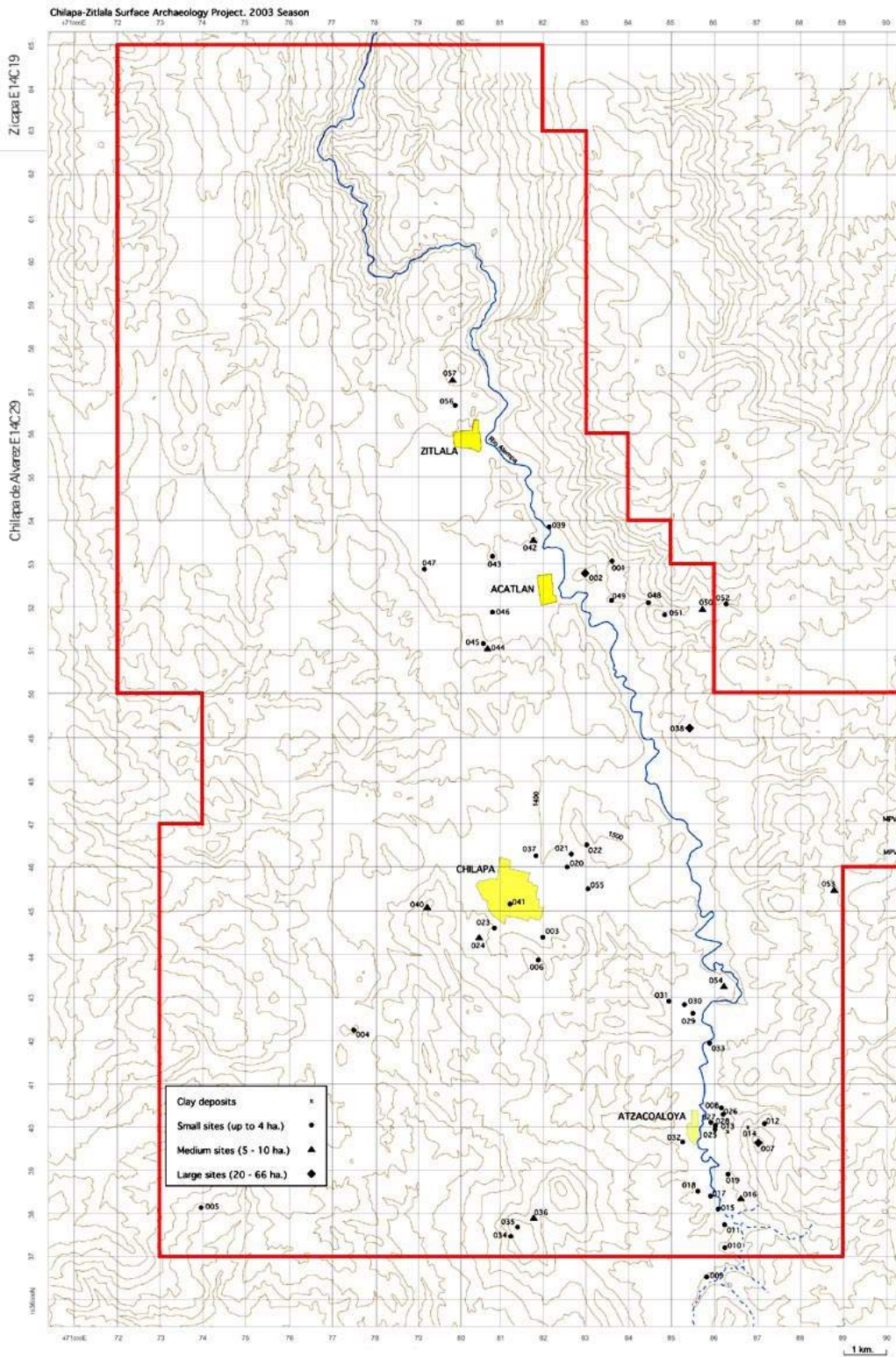


Figure 2. Location of sites within the survey area.



Figure 3. Oxtotitlán cave, seen from the east summit of Cerro Quiotepec (CZ-002).

Another major objective, mainly of a culture-historical nature, is to contextualize the Oxtotitlán paintings and explain the Olmec presence, whether there was a more or less permanent presence of Gulf Coast peoples during the Early and/or Middle Formative periods which would be reflected in Olmec-style artifacts at nearby sites, or if the contact was of a more spurious nature. Lying half way between Teopantecuanitlán to the north (27 km) and Juxtlahuaca to the south (24 km), it would appear to be part of a major Olmec corridor extending from eastern Morelos to central eastern Guerrero.

An attempt will also be made to define the Yope border in the Chilapa area, perhaps locating the Aztec garrison established on the frontier with Yopitzingo (Ortega 1940) in 1458 during Moctezuma Ihuilcamina's reign (Harvey 1967: 3). This is also an area of dry caves, and the possibility of early domestic corn in the Balsas drainage (MacNeish and Eubanks 2000; Matsuoka *et al.* 2002) should be kept in mind.

Fieldwork - Methodology

Rough terrain and the great number of communities where one must talk to authorities before survey make it extremely difficult to carry out either a well-controlled sample survey or full coverage, which would take much too long in such terrain. Therefore I opted for visiting community by community, explaining the project, and contracting a guide or guides to visit sites known to the local people. Sometimes a community would be preparing a fiesta, or they could not help us out at the moment; those we skipped and will come back to next year. Most of the survey was done along the immediate Atempa river drainage. Localization and internal rudimentary mapping of sites was done with a 12-satellite Garmin GPS and the use of air photos. Color print photographs, slides, and digital photographs were taken. Surface materials were placed in material (*manta*) bags and moved to transparent plastic bags once washed and marked, a daily chore at camp. We had two networked computers in the lab in which daily updates of the overall map and bag, photo, and object databases were kept.



Figure 4. CZ-012. The smallest site, defined by a lone projectile point.

Results

During 41 days of actual survey, 57 sites were located; 10,856 sherds and 1,009 lithic objects or fragments were recovered from them. Sites range from very small areas such as a lone projectile point ([Figure 4](#), shown above) and two rock paintings, each less than two meters long, to Comango (CZ-038), a 66-hectare site ([Figure 5](#), shown below). There are 44 sites that range between very small to 3 hectares, ten between 5 and 10 hectares, and three between 20 and 66 hectares ([Figure 2](#)). Due to its obvious importance, two weeks were dedicated to an intensive survey of CZ-002, Cerro Quiotepec ([Figure 6](#), shown below), the 20-hectare site in front of the Oxtotitlán paintings. Forty terraces were mapped with GPS ([Figure 7](#)) and 4,557 sherds were collected just from there. All terraces have ceramics and lithic material, including obsidian blades, silex fragments and points, gray and green stone celts, and an impressive amount of purplish flint.



Figure 5. Comango (CZ-038), a large 66 ha. terraced site.

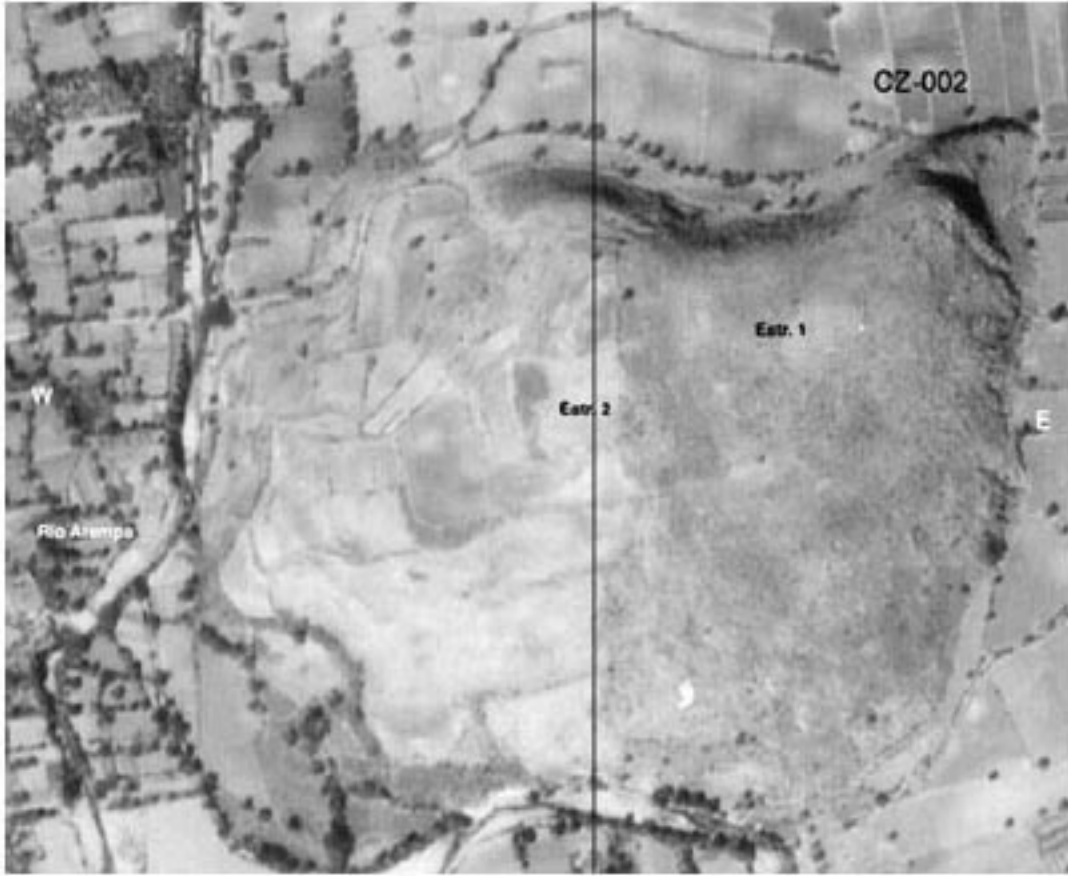


Figure 6. Cerro Quiotepec (CZ-002), 20 ha. terraced site in front of Oxtotitlán cave.



Figure 7. Map of terraces on Cerro Quiotepec.

The following sites were located:

CZ-001	Oxtotitlán
CZ-002	Cerro Quiotepec or Kiyetepec
CZ-003	Frente a la Huerta de Augurio
CZ-004	Tlaltizate
CZ-005	Copaltecruz
CZ-006	Quiauhtepec
CZ-007	Cerro Topiltepec
CZ-008	San Jerónimo
CZ-009	La Ciénega
CZ-010	El Cañaveral
CZ-011	Ciénega Loma
CZ-012	No name
CZ-013	No name
CZ-014	No name
CZ-015	Crucero de Jaguey
CZ-016	Malacastitlán
CZ-017	Cruztlalamulco
CZ-018	Crucero Tlanipatla
CZ-019	La Capilla Verde-Azul
CZ-020	El Garbanzo
CZ-021	Cerro Ciénega
CZ-022	Chilapantépetl
CZ-023	Nochixtlán
CZ-024	La Muralla
CZ-025	San Lucas
CZ-026	Lalo
CZ-027	No name
CZ-028	No name
CZ-029	Ahuixtle
CZ-030	Los Toros
CZ-031	Tehuastitlán
CZ-032	El Calvario
CZ-033	El Arenero
CZ-034	Tesaya
CZ-035	Tizquitzina
CZ-036	Panteón Xochitempa
CZ-037	Corral de Toros
CZ-038	Comango
CZ-039	El Vivero
CZ-040	Mazatepec
CZ-041	Obispado
CZ-042	Tepetzin
CZ-043	Teyapan

- CZ-044 Corona
- CZ-045 Cueva La Corona
- CZ-046 Lagunilla
- CZ-047 Ixtláhuatl
- CZ-048 Tecalixco
- CZ-049 Oxtocapan
- CZ-050 Tula
- CZ-051 Tenantli
- CZ-052 Santa Cruz Poniente
- CZ-053 Lamazintla
- CZ-054 Amoltepec
- CZ-055 Xaxalla
- CZ-056 Cuchillo
- CZ-057 Cuauhlo-tepec



Figure 8. White incised flat-bottom bowls.

Artifact Analysis or Analysis of Materials

Classification of the ceramics is still in the stage of separation by paste. However, preliminary identification of some known Middle Formative types such as flat-bottom white bowls with incising around the inner rim or inner bottom ([Figure 8](#), shown above), Morelos Laca (Hirth and Cyphers 1988: 76; Grove 1987) ([Figure 9](#), shown below), and White-Rim-Black ware ([Figure 10](#), below) is possible now. Composite silhouette bowls with exterior incising suggest Late Formative occupation. Fine red-slipped hemispherical bowls with ring bases ([Figure 11](#), below) are reminiscent of Late Classic materials at Chilpancingo (Schmidt 1976) and Xochipala (Schmidt 1990). Bowls with what appear to be serpent head polychrome supports ([Figure 12](#), below) are clearly Postclassic.



Figure 9. Morelos Laca ceramics.



Figure 10. Pseudo White (Tan) Rim-Black ware.



Figure 11. Fine Red Slipped hemispherical bowls with ring base.



Figure 12. Postclassic serpent head tripod polychrome bowl supports.

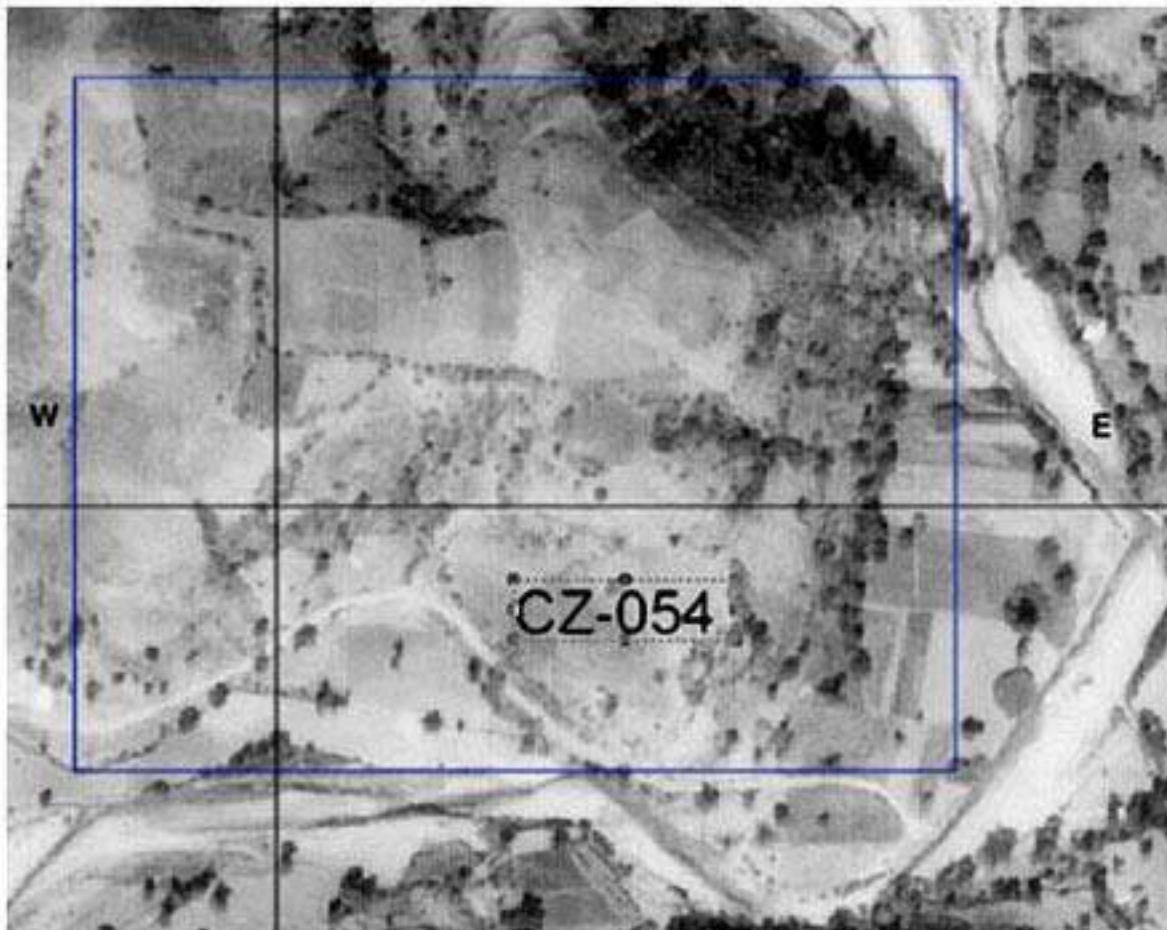


Figure 13. Air photo of Amoltepec (CZ-054).

Preliminary Conclusions

A chronological sequence of local phases and a settlement pattern analysis are still two years away. Nevertheless it is now clear that the area has occupation ranging from the Lower Formative at Amoltepec (CZ-054) ([Figure 13](#), shown above) and La Corona CZ-044. There is Late Formative at La Muralla (CZ-024) ([Figure 14](#)). A human stone relief figure known as La Tesaya (CZ-034) with a year sign headdress ([Figure 15](#), shown below) may be an indication of either Aztec or Mixtec presence during the Late Postclassic. Cerro Quiotepec (CZ-002) has Middle Formative, Late Classic or Epiclassic, and Postclassic occupations. It appears almost certain that the site was both a ceremonial and habitational center at the time the murals of Oxtotitlán were painted, probably to be viewed, from among other places, its eastern summit which is only 400

meters distant with a clear view. The implications as to Olmec presence in the area, beyond that of the painters, must be seriously considered.

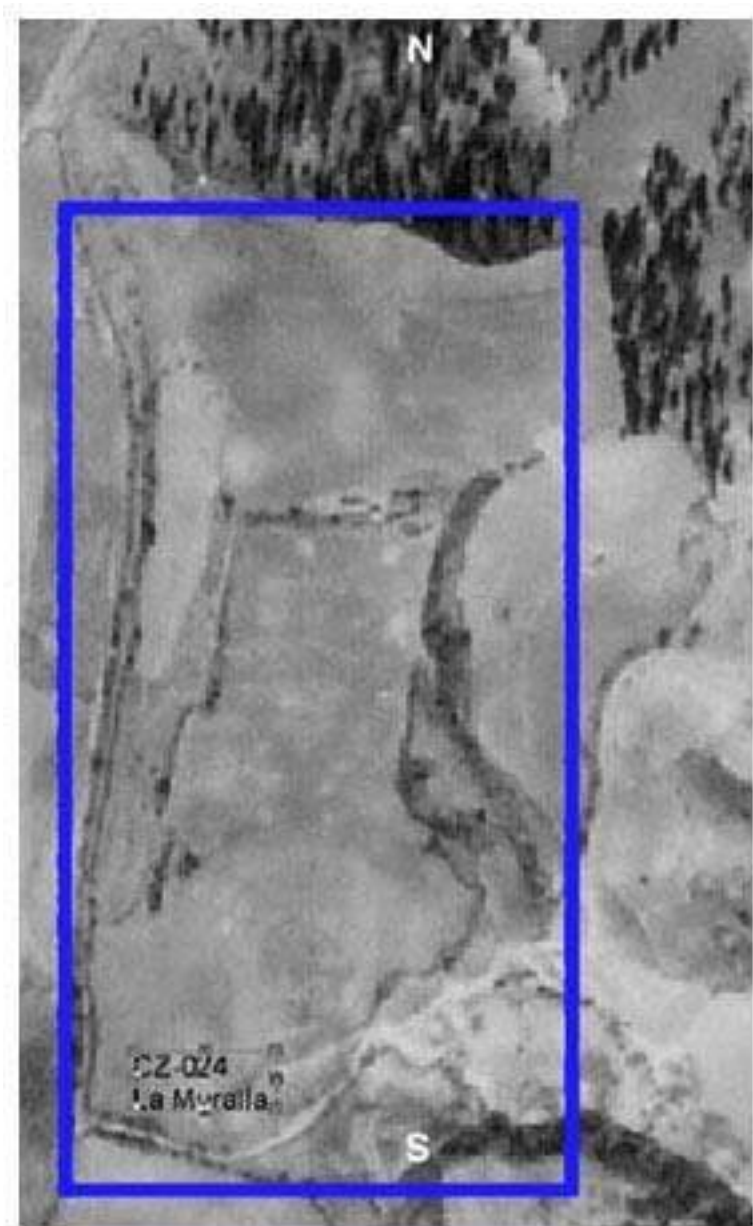


Figure 14. Air photo of La Muralla (CZ-024). The area of trees to the north is now occupied by poachers.



Figure 15. La Tesaya (CZ-034), in the environs of Xochitempa. The figure bears the year sign in its headdress.



Figure 16. The Tisquitzín mountain.

A settlement pattern cannot be defined until there is good control over the chronology. The division I make of types of sites is merely to give a rough idea of their nature. It is still difficult to say how they distributed chronologically. I would even consider that the proximity of the three large sites suggests that there may be an even larger site of a higher rank, perhaps in the area of the Tisquitzín mountain ([Figure 16](#), shown above) which dominates the whole region. The three sites I report from here—CZ-034, CZ-035, and CZ-036—may well be parts of a larger site. This is also the area where I would expect to find the Aztec garrison because it straddles the divide between the Mezcala and Río Azul (Yope country) drainages. The size of the sites is not necessarily representative of their complexity. Several of the small sites have structures, and one especially, Xaxalla (CZ-055), a 2.0-hectare site ([Figure 17](#), shown below), has twice as many sherds per hectare—438—than its closest runner up, Cerro Quiotepec (CZ-002). All the medium sites have plazas surrounded by structures; one, Cuauhlopec (CZ-057), has the only ballcourt found so far ([Figure 18](#), [Figure 19](#), shown below).



Figure 17. Xaxalla (CZ-055). A site with a very high density of sherds.

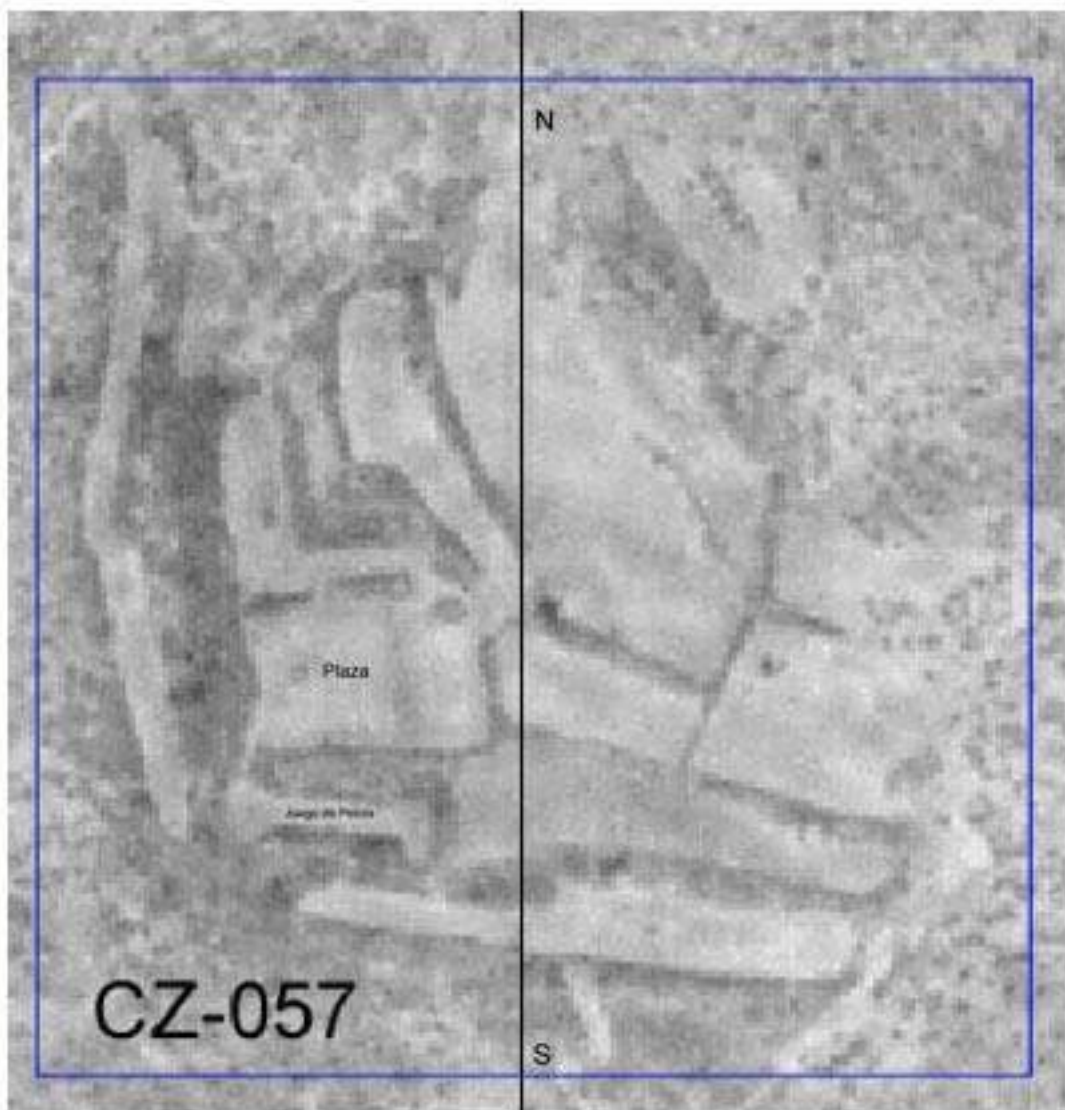


Figure 18. Air photo of Cuauhlo-tepec (CZ-057).



Figure 19. Ballcourt at Cuauhlo-tepec (CZ-057).

Future Field Seasons

The project is planned for three seasons. Next year I plan to finish surveying the immediate Atempa river drainage, covering the towns of Trigomila, Atempa, and Nejapa between Acatlán and Atzacoyaloya, and north from Acatlán to north of Zitlala. I will go back to CZ-038 ([Figure 5](#)), CZ-057 ([Figure 18](#), [Figure 19](#)), and the area around Xochitempa ([Figure 16](#)) to carry out more intensive mapping and survey, as was done at CZ-002. Funds allowing, test pits will be excavated at CZ-054, Amoltepec ([Figure 13](#)); CZ-024, La Muralla ([Figure 14](#)); and CZ-002, Cerro Quiotepec ([Figure 6](#), [Figure 7](#)) with the purpose of supporting seriation with stratigraphic materials. By the end of the 2004 season, and during the 2005 season, I will be moving west from the river.



Figure 20. An old looter's pit at La Muralla (CZ-024).



Figure 21. A minutes-old looter's pit at Cerro Tenantli (CZ-051).

Looting

Sites are being damaged by means of looting and urban expansion. Not only did we come across numerous instances of old pits dug by looters ([Figure 20](#), shown above), and in one instance the remains of the excavation was so fresh that I suspect the looters were running down the western side of Cerro Tenantli as we were climbing up the east flank ([Figure 21](#), above). The city of Chilapa is on the verge of overrunning two sites. Next to one, La Muralla, CZ-024, the owner of the land is on the verge of selling the site as lots in order to avoid it being overrun by poachers who, supported by a political party, have reached the edge of the site ([Figure 22](#), shown below). The other case is CZ-055, Xaxalla, where the hill is literally being torn down for building material ([Figure 23](#), below). Both of these sites are important to understanding the area; the first because of Late Formative occupation, the second due to the presence of a great density of unique ceramics.



Figure 22. Poachers on the verge of overrunning La Muralla (CZ-024).



Figure 23. Tearing away at the Xaxalla (CZ-055) hill.



Figure 24. The survey team. From left to right: Paul Schmidt, Gabriel Lima, Iliana Miguel, and Eliseo Padilla.

Research Team

The research survey was carried out by myself, my two assistants, Iliana Miguel and Eliseo Padilla. Gabriel Lima, our guide and interpreter from Acatlán is now practically an archaeologist ([Figure 24](#)). Iliana and Eliseo continue work on the ceramics throughout the year.

Acknowledgments

First of all to the Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas of the National University of México and the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., (FAMSI); their financial support made this project possible. I appreciate the efforts of Mari Carmen Serra, from the first, and Sandra Noble, from the latter, who spent a lot of time answering my doubts. To the Consejo Nacional de Arqueología, especially Ing. Joaquín García-Bárcena, its President. David Grove, Jaime Litvak, and Linda Manzanilla played various important roles in landing the project. I appreciate the help of many people in Chilapa, especially Alicia Gutiérrez, María de Jesús Gutiérrez, and

Victor Manuel Walle who helped us find a house and get settled. Maclovio Ariza, Mayor of Chilapa, and Genaro Tiburcio, his Secretary, helped out in many practical matters. Dr. Augurio Hernández not only took care of our minor ailments, but as a serious amateur he was most generous in sharing his knowledge of the region. The help of Gabriel Lima, from Acatlán, our guide and interpreter, has been invaluable. Thanks to colleagues who visited us in the field with good suggestions: Raúl Arana, Carmen Chacón, David Grove, Olaf Jaime, Rosa Reyna, Samuel Villela, and Fernando Orozco. To persons in various communities who have been helpful: Domingo Fiscaleño and Bonifacio Ramírez from Atzacoyaloya, Simón Ahuixtle from Mirafior, Domingo Morales from Teomatatlán, Luis Chávez from Lamazintla, Guillermo Andraca from Chilapa, Alberto Seis from Acatlán, and Oscar Jerónimo and Alejandra Hilario from Zitlala.

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