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The Reorganization of the Huichol Ceremonial Precinct (Tukipa) of Guadalupe Ocotán, Nayarit, México

Translation of the Spanish by Eduardo Williams



Research Year: 2005

Culture: Huichol

Chronology: Modern

Location: Nayarit, México

Site: Guadalupe Ocotán

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Abstract

This report summarizes the results of research undertaken in Guadalupe Ocotán, a dependency and agrarian community located in the municipality of La Yesca, Nayarit. This study explores in greater depth the political and ceremonial relations that existed between the ceremonial district of *Xatsitsarie* and *San Andrés Cohamiata*, one of three *Wixaritari* (Huichol) communities in the area of the Chapalagana River, in the northern area of the state of Jalisco ([Figure 1](#), shown below). Moreover, it analyzes how the destruction of the Temple (*Tuki*) of Guadalupe Ocotán, together with the modification of the community's territory, determined the collapse of these ceremonial links in the second half of the 20th century.

The ceremonial reorganization of this district is analyzed using a diachronic perspective, in which the ethnographic record, which begins with Lumholtz' work in the late 19th century, is contrasted with reports by missionaries and oral history. Similarly, on the basis of ethnographic data and information provided by archaeological studies, this study offers a reinterpretation of certain ethnohistorical sources related to the antecedents of these ceremonial centers.

Resumen

Este reporte resume los resultados de la investigación realizada en la Guadalupe Ocotán, una gobernancia y comunidad agraria ubicada en el municipio de La Yesca, Nayarit. Este trabajo ha profundizado en las relaciones políticas y ceremoniales que existieron entre el distrito ceremonial de *Xatsitsarie* y *San Andrés Cohamiata*, una de las tres comunidades *Wixaritari* (huicholas) ubicadas en la zona del río Chapalagana, al norte del estado de Jalisco ([Figura 1](#), mostrada arriba). De igual modo, analiza la forma en que la destrucción del Templo (*Tuki*) de Guadalupe Ocotán, así como la modificación del territorio comunitario, determinó el colapso de estos nexos ceremoniales en la segunda mitad del siglo XX.

La reorganización ceremonial de este distrito es analizada desde una perspectiva diacrónica, en que el registro etnográfico, iniciado por Lumholtz a finales del siglo XIX, es contrastado con los reportes de los misioneros y la historia oral. De igual modo, a partir de la etnografía y la información proporcionada por los estudios arqueológicos, presenta una reinterpretación de algunas fuentes etnohistóricas sobre los antecedentes de estos recintos ceremoniales.

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Figure 1. Area occupied by the Huichol communities in the Chapalagana River zone. Map adapted from Atlas del Ḿxico prehispánico. Especial de Arqueología Mexicana 5, INAH, 2000:6.

Linguistic Note

For writing words in the *Wixarika* (or Huichol) language I have used the alphabet developed by the Department of Studies of Indian Languages of the University of Guadalajara, which is based on the pioneering work of Grimes and MacIntosh. This alphabet consists of five vocals: a, e, i, i, u. With the exception of /i/, which has a sound between /i/ and /u/, the rest of the vowels are pronounced the same as in Spanish. There are thirteen consonants: voiceless stop: /p/, /t/, /k/, /kw/, /ʔ/; voiceless fricative: /h/; voiceless affricate: /ts/; nasal: /m/, /n/; tap or flap (Vibrante simple): /r/; trill (Vibrante múltiple): /x/; voiced semivowel: /w/, /y/.

The *Wixarika* language has several ways to express plurality, for instance the word *Wixarika* defines this ethnic group and its territory, while the word *Wixaritari* is used to define a group of people, or communities. The words *Tuki* and *Xiriki*, which define the ceremonial precincts analyzed in this study, become plural if the particle **te**: is added, for instance: *Tukite*, *Xirikite*. The word *Tukipa* refers to a ceremonial complex composed of a *Tuki*, a patio and one or more *Xirikite*. The ceremonial offices of *Kawiteru* and *Mara'akame* are pluralized thus: *Kawiterutsixi* and *Mara'akate*.

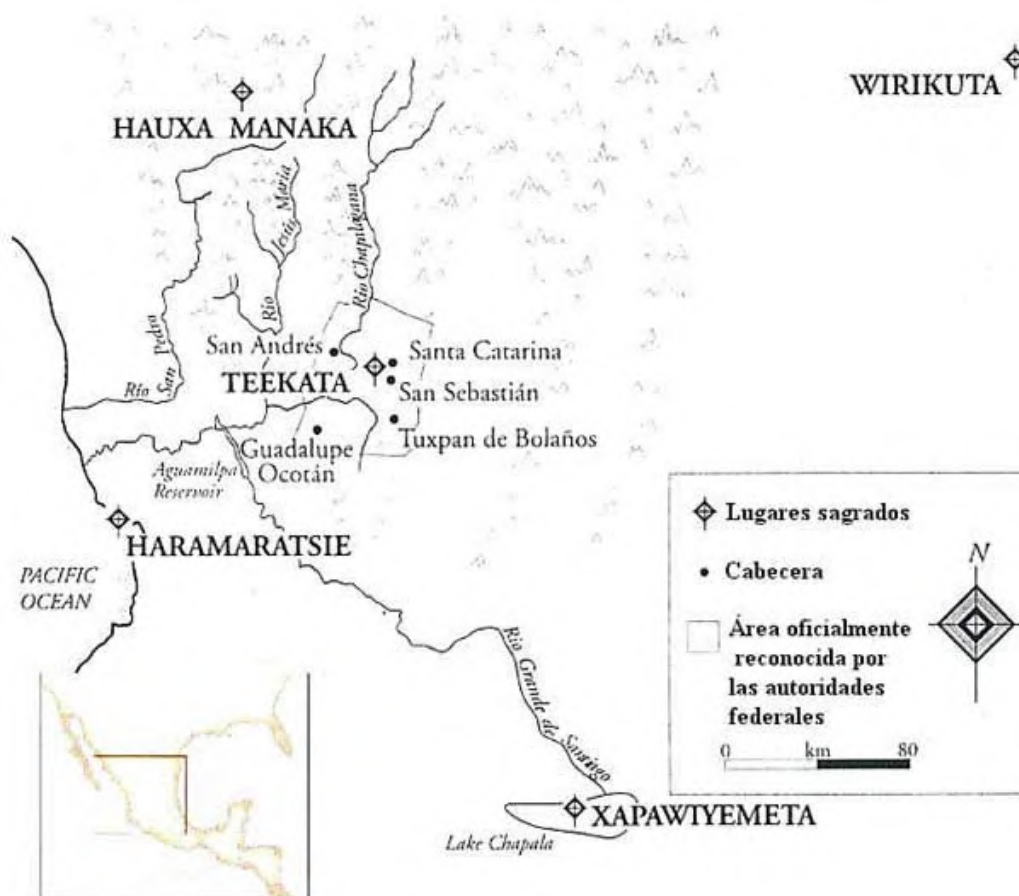


Figure 2. Wixarika territory drawn by Susan Alta Martin, after Liffman 2000: 130.

Introduction

The political and ceremonial organization of modern Wixaritari (or Huichol) communities is structured on several levels. The first level is linked with centers of political, ceremonial, and territorial organization of Prehispanic origin, which have persisted until modern times: the great temples or ceremonial precincts known as *Tukipa*, the *Xirikite*, or lesser shrines, and finally the sacred places dispersed in the current states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Durango and San Luis Potosí (Figure 2, shown above). The second level is integrated by several institutions introduced by missionaries and colonial authorities in order to organize the political life of Indian peoples: the *casas reales* (royal houses) and the chapels, which are the seats of each town's civil and religious hierarchies, as well as the *mojonerías*¹ which help to mark the limits of the lands belonging to each community, based on land titles granted by the Spanish authorities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The third level consists of a series of civil offices linked to the *municipio* (municipality) and to agrarian authorities introduced by the Mexican state in the twentieth century, which in spite of their character were assimilated into the communities' ceremonial life.



Figure 3. Pintura del Nuevo Reino de Galicia. After Acuña (1988, between pages 150 and 151).

¹ Piled-up rocks.

Architectural Influences

The architecture of the ceremonial precincts dispersed throughout Huichol territory, as well as the political and ceremonial organization that characterizes them, represent one of the *Wixaritari's* more remarkable cultural features. Nowadays their existence represents part of the political organization that prevailed in the Nayarita zone in Prehispanic times. The first reference about these precincts is found in the *Pintura del Nuevo Reino de Galicia*, drawn in ca. 1542 ([Figure 3](#), shown above), while their political and ceremonial importance was described by several authors: Francisco del Barrio (1990 [1604]), Arregui (1980 [1620]), Tello (1990 [1650]), Arias de Saavedra (1990 [1673]) and Ortega (1944 [1754]).

The temples' design, characterized by their circular structure and a conical straw roof supported by tall wooden posts, shows influence of several cultural traditions, primarily the Bolaños culture and the Teuchitlán tradition. The latter flourished in central Jalisco as a response against Teotihuacan's expansion, and represents the existence of a complex society in which architecture became a social and economic investment that subsumed culture, politics and ideology of a society to materialize a particular worldview (Weigand 1993). The influence exerted by this cultural tradition prevailed throughout a wide area of Western Mexico, and the architectural complexity shown by each site reveals the existence of well-organized regional hierarchies (Cabrero 1992; Weigand and García 2000) ([Figure 4](#), shown below).



Figure 4. Geographic distribution of the Teuchitlán tradition and related sites after Beekman and Weigand 2000: 20-21.

This situation is evident in the development of the Bolaños culture (from the first to the ninth century A.D.), which spread throughout northern Jalisco (Tenzompa, Huejuquilla, El Cañón de Bolaños, and the Upper Chapalagana River, occupied by the ancestors of the Huicholes and Tepecanos) and southern Zacatecas (Juchipila and Tlaltenango). This culture originated by the colonization of this zone by groups with a long

Mesoamerican tradition, bearers of the Teuchitlán and Chalchihuites traditions.² Its importance as commercial intermediary and producer of raw goods (primarily minerals) allowed the Bolaños culture to reach a high level of cultural development, characterized by the fusion of the more outstanding features of each tradition: from Teuchitlán it adopted an architectural pattern with round plazas as well as funerary customs; from Chalchihuites it incorporated lithic and ceramic technology (Cabrero 1989, 1992).

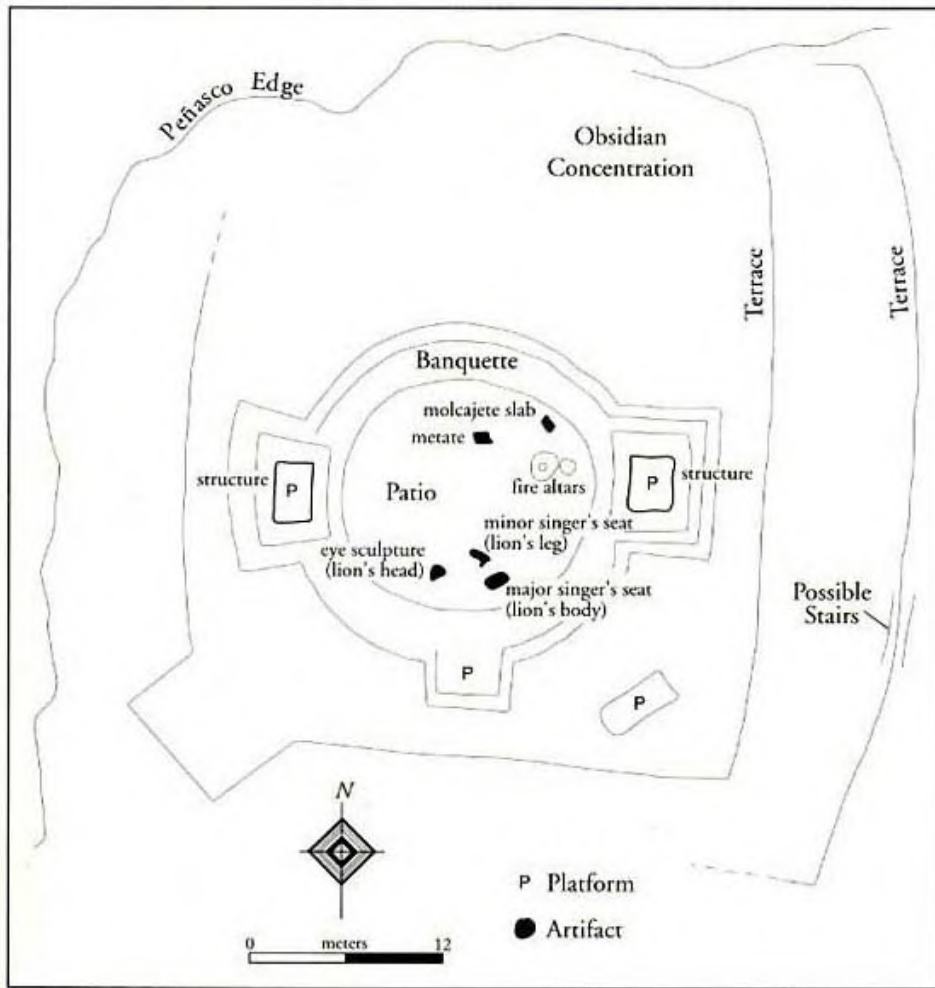


Figure 5. Cerro Colotlán's circular complex after Weigand and García 2000: 17.

The main archaeological sites pertaining to the Bolaños culture are Tenzompa and Cerro del Huistle, in Huejuquilla (Hers 1989); Totoate, in the municipality of Mezquitic, near Nostic (Hrdlicka 1903; Kelley 1971; Cabrero 1992); San Martín de Bolaños (Cabrero 1992); Juchipila (Mozzillo n.d.); Tlaltenango (Darling) and Cerro de Colotlán,

² The Chalchihuites culture was characterized by a mining tradition which exploited turquoise and hematite, as well as by lithic and ceramic technologies, while the Teuchitlán-Ahualulco tradition was distinguished by the exploitation of obsidian deposits, as well as malachite, azurite, flint and quartz (Cabrero 1992; Weigand 1993; Weigand and García 1996).

in San Lorenzo Azqueltán, where Mason (1912, 1913, 1918, 1981; Weigand 1992, 1993; Weigand and García 2000) recorded some ceremonies performed during the second decade of the 20th century [Figure 5](#), shown above). Other archaeological evidences are found in Arroyo de los Gavilanes, near the ceremonial complex at Teakata, in the Huichol community of Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán; also in Tsewi, within the boundaries of San Sebastián, as well as other smaller sites within this community and San Andrés Cohamiata (Weigand and García 2000). These sites are characterized by the existence of sunken patios, surrounded by banquettes and circular and rectangular platforms with terraces and stairs, altars and small pyramids, big corral-style rooms and possible ball game courts ([Figure 6](#), shown below).

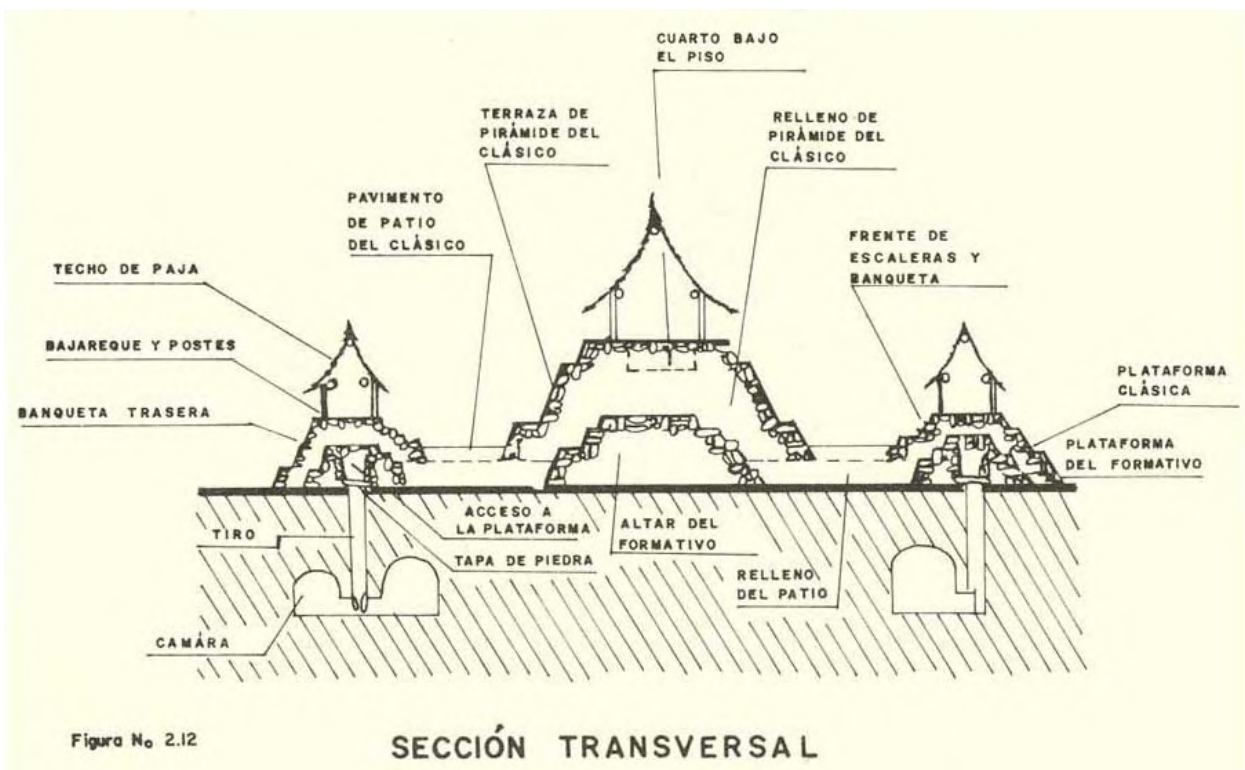


Figure 6. Diagram of the Teuchitlán tradition’s architectural elements after Weigand 1993: 60.

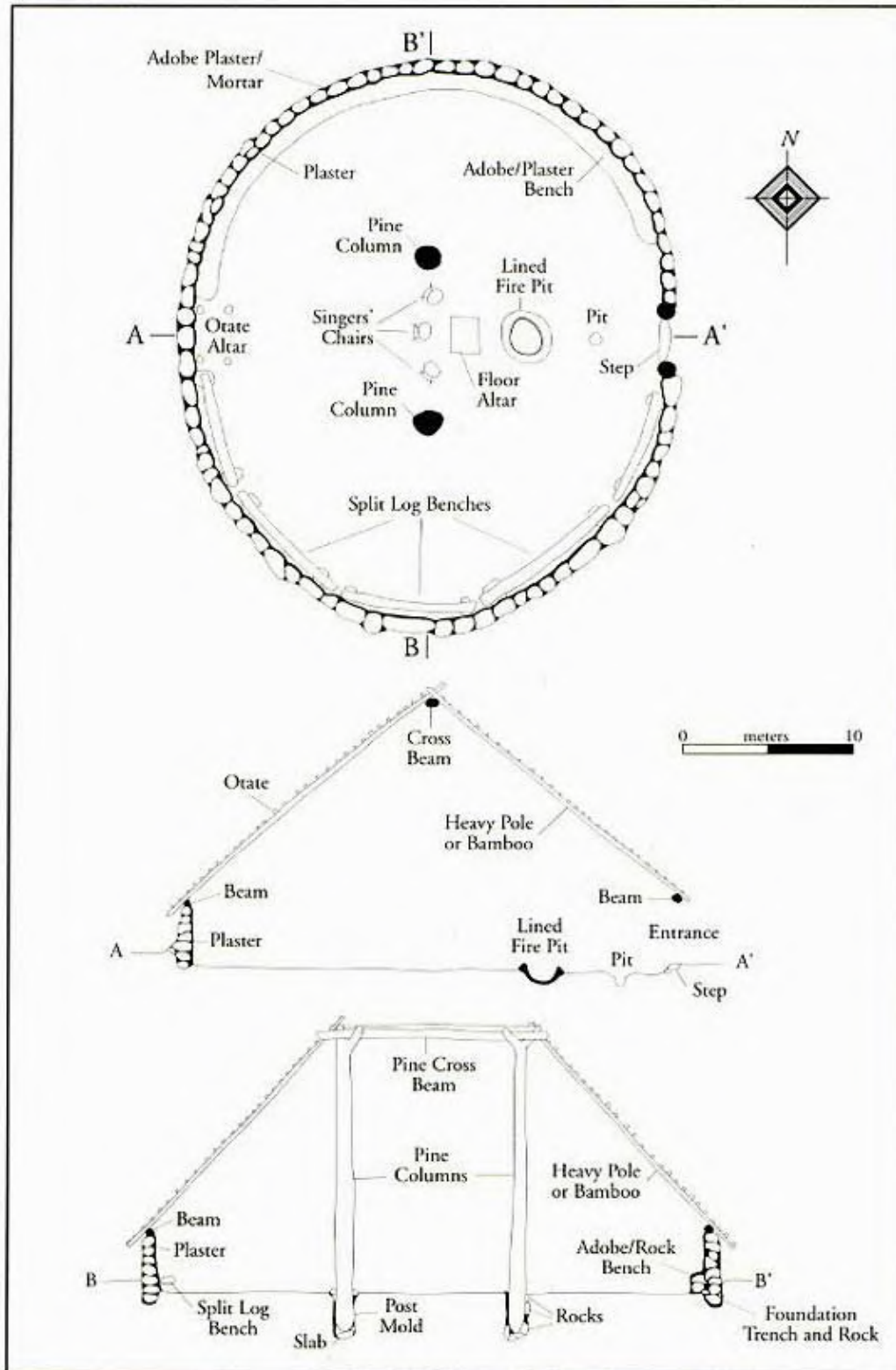


Figure 7. Idealized plan of a modern Tuki after Weigand and García 2000: 21.

This type of architecture must have inspired the spatial distribution of the circular or oval precincts where the Huichol perform their ceremonies, although their architecture is less developed than the one documented by archaeologists ([Figure 7](#), shown above). Hers (1989, 2002) points out that the building technique found in Cerro del Huistle (A.D. 500-800) was based on a foundation made of two parallel rows with fill in the middle, while the foundations of the later settlements, which still prevail among the contemporary Huichol, consist of a single row of big rocks ([Figure 8](#), shown below).



Figure 8. Foundations of Guadalupe Ocotán's Tuki. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

When combining ethnohistorical and archaeological information, it is evident that the temples and centers of peregrination which still exist in the Nayarita area³ and throughout the extensive Huichol territory represent the remnants of tributary relationships and trade routes that were in use during the Prehispanic period and were disarticulated by the advance of the Spaniards. On the other hand, the evangelization process tried to wipe out indigenous ceremonial activities, which were focused on ancestor worship, by destroying temples and shrines, since they were also the foundations of political organization in the area. In order to break this relationship between sacred places and ritual activities, it was necessary to relocate the indigenous population in new settlements, organized around missions to facilitate evangelization.⁴ By the 18th century the Huichol of the Chapalagana River area were organized in three communities: San Sebastián Teponahuatlán, Santa Catarina Cuexcomatlán, and San Adrés Cohamiata, where the ceremonial precincts retain their importance.⁵

The ceremonial precincts form part of a complex hierarchical structure, in which each temple represents a ceremonial district which incorporates several dispersed ranchos (i.e. small rural communities) each with a shrine (*Xiriki*) that represents all domestic units. Each district is subordinate to a ceremonial center of greater antiquity. In each district the temple congregates the *Jicareros* or *Xukuri:kate*, who represent the extended families to fulfill the Huichol ceremonial cycle, related to the agrarian cycle, to the peregrinations to sacred places, and to the chanting of sacred myths, which is performed by the *Kawiteru* or principal elder of each district. These celebrations are carried out, initially, in the most important *Tukipa* of each community, and later in the other temples, according to their importance. The renovation of these precincts' roofs is a ritualized activity that takes place every five years.

The structure and distribution of ceremonial precincts have been analyzed by ethnography. The following authors have made the most important observations: Lumholtz (1986); Digué (1992); Preuss (1998); Zingg (1982, 1998); Fabila (1959); Weigand (1992); Weigand and García (2000); Liffman (2000); Neurath (1998, 2000); and Téllez (2005). Most studies are focused on the analysis of celebrations and ceremonial obligations associated with the precincts, as well as the patterns of reciprocity between *Tukipa* districts based on kinship and ceremonial exchange (Neurath 1998, 2000; Gutiérrez del Ángel 2002). However, the framework for this analysis has been primarily structuralist, therefore contributing to a synchronic view of territory and ritual which precludes a real understanding of the political and ceremonial

³ "Nayarita zone" refers to the area occupied by indigenous societies north of the Rio Grande de Santiago (Coras, Huicholes, Tecuales, and Tepecanos), which at least until the early 18th century had not been conquered by the Spaniards.

⁴ Between the 16th and 17th centuries, the Huichol Indians were reorganized in "Indian republics" or communities, such as Colotlán (in 1563), toward the east; Huejuquilla, which included San Nicolás, Soledad, Tenzompa, and Nostic (1644); Mezquitic (1611) toward the north; Huajimic (1610); Camotlán (1624), and Amatlán de Xora (1620) toward the south. Other settlements in the area were Ostoc and Mamata, belonging to Apozolco and Acapulco, which were assigned to Totatiche.

⁵ During the second half of this century, the Huichol's territory was invaded by plantation owners and miners who needed the Indians' natural resources (water, forests, lands) to furnish the mines of Bolaños with food and fuel, a situation that recrudescence a century later.

dynamics within the communities. In other words, this outlook presents Huichol ceremonial life, as well as their territorial organization and the importance of Tukipa precincts, in an almost static way from the 18th century onwards. In contrast, Weigand and Téllez have analyzed the sociopolitical factors that have determined the collapse and resurgence of these precincts under new rules of organization (Weigand 1992; Weigand and García 2000; Téllez 2005, 2006).



Figure 9. Guadalupe Ocotán's Tuki. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

The Tukipa District of Xatsitsarie

Since colonial times missionaries used the word *Kaliwei*⁶ to refer to the great ceremonial precincts in each district (*Tukite*) and to the shrines dedicated to ancestors in each rancho (*Xirikite*). In the mid-nineteenth century Fray José Guadalupe de Jesús Vázquez wrote a report in which he accurately defined these precincts: "there are two kinds of buildings or houses [made of] straw huts," the first one being the Tuki, in which according to the same source "they gathered to make their feasts full of superstitious ceremonies, this [building] is of circular form" (Figure 9, shown above). The second one "[...]is smaller and divided in the upper half with (something) like a wattle awning. In both houses they have an altar, but in the latter it usually is above, and it is supposed to be a shrine or temple for their idols and it is toward it that the crowd is directed from the greater place" (cited in Rojas 1992: 169) (Figure 10 and Figure 11, shown below).

⁶ This word is derived from the Nahuatl *huey calli*, meaning "big house".



Figure 10. Xiriki, attached to Guadalupe Ocotán’s Casa de Gobierno (Government House). Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.



Figure 11. Interior of the Xiriki at Rancho Laguna Seca, San Sebastián Teponahuatlán, Jalisco. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

This account, like the one written by Fray Miguel de J. Ma. Guzmán⁷ (cited in Rojas 1992: 177-185) describes the campaign for the destruction of ceremonial precincts, as well as the offerings typically found in the greater shrines: arrows and bows with beadwork decorations; feathers; animal figures made of clay or wax; *equipales* (chairs); deer antlers; nets made of string representing the traps used for hunting deer; mats made of woven wool with depictions of deer; and reeds wrapped in cotton which could be impregnated with mother's milk or peyote juice, among other items (Figure 12, shown below) (cited in Rojas 1992: 171, 178, 179). In comparing the accounts written by missionaries with the ethnographic record, started in the last two decades of the 19th century, one can see the continuity of practices associated with ceremonial precincts, as well as several transformations. In the 19th century the Nayarita area had already been affected by armed uprisings that were part of the Mexican war of independence and by the struggles between liberals and conservatives. These wars, together with the advance of colonial administration and the process of evangelization, caused the reorganization of Huichol territory. Some communities disintegrated while new settlements were founded within the boundaries of other communities, giving rise to new towns such as Guadalupe Ocotán and Tuxpan de Bolaños (Télez 2006a).



Figure 12. Offerings deposited in the Aitsarie cave, in the ceremonial complex of Teakata, Santa Catarina Cuexcomatlán, Jalisco. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

⁷ Fray José Guadalupe de Jesús Vázquez was the president and vice-prefect of the missions, while Fray Miguel de J. Ma. Guzmán was the friar commissar.

The first mention of Guadalupe Ocotán dates to 1848, when the missionaries of the Colegio de Propaganda Fide founded a congregation within the boundaries of the Indian community of San Andrés Cohamiata, which became a mission in 1853. Apparently, the families gathered in this place came from Huajimic, a community located south of San Andrés Cohamiata.⁸ From the inception of this new congregation a system of civic-religious cargos was instituted, independent from the community where it had been established (Rojas 1992; Téllez 2005). Although the accounts written by the missionaries who took part in the foundation of this settlement never mentioned the existence of a native population in the area, the local oral history mentions the existence of a ceremonial district known as *Xatsitsarie*, with close political and ceremonial links with *Tateikie*/San Andrés Cohamiata. Likewise, thanks to the oral history we can assess the way in which the families gathered around the mission were gradually assimilated with the native population of this district (Téllez 2005, 2006).

The existence of the Tukipa precinct of *Xatsitsarie* is hinted at in the report written by Father Vázquez in 1853 (cited in Rojas 1992: 172). According to Father Vázquez, the temple around which the Indians congregated to perform their main celebrations was destroyed, as well as several minor shrines,⁹ but they were promptly rebuilt. Although this priest does not mention their exact location, both oral history and geographical features allow us to place this precinct on a hill known as Kaliwei or Tukipa; both Huichol names refer to this precinct, whose ceremonial functions persisted at least until the third decade of the 20th century¹⁰ (Téllez 2005, 2006). Apparently, the territory occupied by this ceremonial district was greater than it is in the present. Although it is difficult to determine all the *ranchos* that integrated it, some local inhabitants remember that families from Acatita and Takwatsi, northeast of Guadalupe Ocotán, took part in the hierarchy that took care of this temple. However, the territorial modifications integrated these ranches within the political and ceremonial organization of San Sebastián Teponahuatlán.

The Revolutionary Period and the Reorganization of the Community

During the first decades of the 20th century the revolutionary movement and the *Cristiada* (a war waged by Catholic peasants against the Mexican state) had left a legacy of violence and disorganization in Huichol territory. Entire families were exiled in the Tecual-Huichol area, on the margins of the Santiago River, while others sought

⁸ During the Mexican War of Independence, the native population was displaced from this community and settled at the foot of the Sierra, near the Santiago River (Rojas 1992, 1993; Téllez 2005, 2006).

⁹ Between these should be the shrines of the native population, but also of the families that were gathered around the mission.

¹⁰ At the end of the 19th century Lumholtz pointed out that "due to the ruinous situation of the pagan temple I inferred that the native religion was neglected, though it seems that the ancient dances and ceremonies are faithfully observed" (Lumholtz 1986a, Vol. II: 281), while Preuss, who visited the Nayarita area in 1905, pointed out that there was no temple in this *gobernancia* (Preuss 1998: 179-180). Apparently Lumholtz is referring to Guadalupe Ocotán's Casa Real, and neither he nor Preuss knew the temple located north of this town.

refuge in several towns in Jalisco. Some precincts were destroyed or abandoned during the fighting. Once the area was pacified, it went through a process of reorganization characterized by the return of some families to their respective communities. In some cases the civic and religious hierarchies became more important than the ceremonial structure associated with the Tukipa precincts, which went through a process of gradual reorganization, as seen in San Sebastián Teponahuaxtlán (as documented by Weigand 1992).

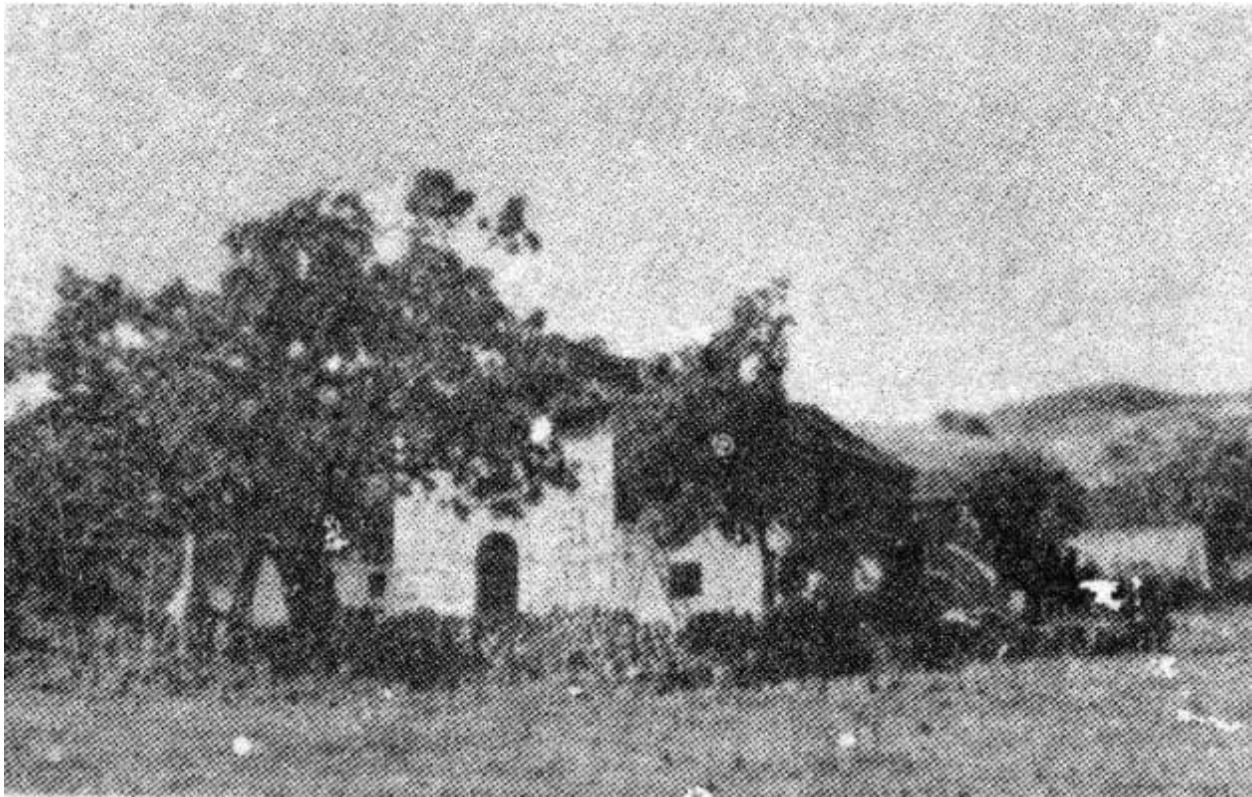


Figure 13. Guadalupe Ocotán's chapel in the fifties. After Hernández n.d.

During the Cristiada the population of the ceremonial district of *Xatsitsarie*/Guadalupe Ocotán was dispersed toward the Tecual-Huichol area, or took refuge in the neighborhood of San Andrés, the *cabecera* (head town) of the community. During this period San Andrés' Tukipa precinct was destroyed, as well as the symbols that represented the existence of this indigenous *gobernancia* (government): the *casa de gobierno* (government house); the *varas de mando* (ruler's staffs) and the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, kept in the chapel. Once hostilities ended, the families belonging to this *gobernancia*, who had taken refuge in San Andrés, returned to their homes and tried to reorganize their political and ceremonial life. However, the Tukipa was not rebuilt, but was replaced by a chapel (Figure 13, shown above), the second most important ceremonial precinct in Guadalupe Ocotán. This process started with a trip to Wirikuta/Real de Catorce (San Luis Potosí) to gather peyote. While passing through Zacatecas the pilgrims received from the local bishop a new image of the Virgin of

Guadalupe, which during the following years presided over the feasts linked with the Huichol ceremonial cycle and the Catholic celebrations adopted by the Huichol (Ash Wednesday, Easter, Corpus Christi, among others) ([Figure 14](#), shown below).



Figure 14. Holy Week celebration at Guadalupe Ocotán. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

During the fifties the missionaries reinitiated their activities in the Wixarika territory and, after some time, forbid the celebration of indigenous ceremonies in the chapel. Apparently, during this time native rituals were moved to the Casa Real, seat of the civic hierarchy of this *gobernancia*. The pressures exerted by the priests forced these practices to be moved to the ceremonial precinct of *Witakwa/La Mesa* ([Figure 15](#), shown below). *Witakwa/La Mesa* is one of the oldest *ranchos* in the Tukipa district of Xatsitsarie, and apparently one of the most influential. It is no accident that this happened, since this rancho's name translates as *Ante patio*, (forecourt), indicating its closeness to the old ceremonial precinct of this district. Furthermore, the organization of the extended family associated with this *rancho* prevailed after the violence unleashed during the Revolution and the *Cristiada*. At present its small temple is recognized as a Tuki, descended from the original one. Nevertheless, a series of factors caused the ceremonies to be moved to the *Casa de gobierno* (the house of government), in the *cabecera* of Guadalupe Ocotán.



Figure 15. Ceremonial precinct at Witakwa/La Mesa after the roof was renovated. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

The Fragmentation of the Community

The territory pertaining to San Andrés Cohamiata was fragmented in the sixties. Through a selective use of agrarian legislation, some ceremonial districts of this community were annexed to agrarian nuclei belonging to the states of Nayarit, Durango, and Zacatecas (Téllez 2005, 2006b). Most of them retained their ceremonial links with the mother community, but the constant reorganization of Guadalupe Ocotán, favored by the missionaries' incursion and the new families that came with them, brought about the disintegration of the ceremonial organization of this district. In the fifties the *mestizos* (e.g. people of mixed Indian-Spanish background) from Huajimic redoubled their efforts to appropriate the lands of this district. In response, deeply rooted families in the area struggled to maintain their ties with San Andrés. However, the relationships between *mestizo* cattlemen, missionaries, and some families from the area fostered a confrontation between the traditionalist sector and part of the population who wanted Guadalupe Ocotán to be annexed to Huajimic and to become part of the state of Nayarit (Téllez 2005, 2006a, 2006b).

In 1961 Guadalupe Ocotán became an annex of the indigenous community of Huajimic, although the confrontations persisted between the "traditionalists" and the "separatists" or "progressives". Proof of these confrontations is the existence of two civic-religious hierarchies. Apparently one of them was associated with the traditionalist sector and the

Tuki of Witakwa, keeping close ties with San Andrés Cohamiata, while the other was recognized by the progressives and the *mestizo* authorities in Huajimic. Years later the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) intervened on several occasions to put an end to this conflict. Finally, after lengthy negotiations, the political and ceremonial organization of Guadalupe Ocotán was reconfigured. On the one hand the traditionalist sector – or at least some of its representatives – agreed to acknowledge that Guadalupe Ocotán belonged to the state of Nayarit, in exchange for control of the resources generated for the area by the Plan HUICOT.¹¹

On the other hand, the reestablishment of a single civic-religious hierarchy was achieved, based in Guadalupe Ocotán's *Casa de gobierno*. However, there was an important modification in the community's ceremonial life. During the period when the Tuki of Witakwa/La Mesa served as the setting for communal ceremonies, there was a fusion between the rituality associated with the Tuki and the Christian ceremonial activities that supported the civic-religious hierarchy. At present, very important ceremonies such as *Hiwatsixa/Las Últimas* and *Yuimakwaxa/Tambor* are carried out by this civic-religious hierarchy in the *Casa de gobierno* rather than the Tukipa, where the members of the said hierarchy as representatives of the community assumed the role of Xukuri'ikate. These ceremonies should have brought together all the people in the community, but usually only the members of the civic-religious hierarchy and their families took part. The celebration of these feasts in the *Casa de gobierno* set the example for each rancho to fulfill these ceremonies in its respective ceremonial space.

Another important change affected the celebration of the *Hikuri Neixa* or "peyote feast", which used to take place after the pilgrimage to Wirikuta as an initiation rite for the community. This ceremony has lost this character in Guadalupe Ocotán, and is only celebrated in the Xirikite of some ranchos or in domestic units located in the main town. Although the Xukuri'ikate also fulfilled the role of Hikuri'ikate (peyote bearer) in the pilgrimage to Wirikuta, in this *gobernancia* only the people who want to be *Maraka'ame* (shaman) or who want to fulfill a religious promise in this sacred place perform this ceremony on their return. The ruins of the old Tukipa, like the streams and boundary stones, became sacred places within the limits of the community, where offerings were deposited.

¹¹ This acronym is a synthesis of the words Huichol-Cora-Tepehuán. This plan was promoted by Mexican *indigenismo* (i.e. the study of or predilection for the history, culture, protection, and development of the Indians), and attempted to integrate Indian communities to national development through the introduction of basic services, such as access to running water, electric power, roads, community stores, and so on. At the same time the Plan Huicot promoted some cultural manifestations. The creation of school-shelters inside Huichol territory served to counteract the education provided by the missionaries, which tried to take students away from ceremonial life.

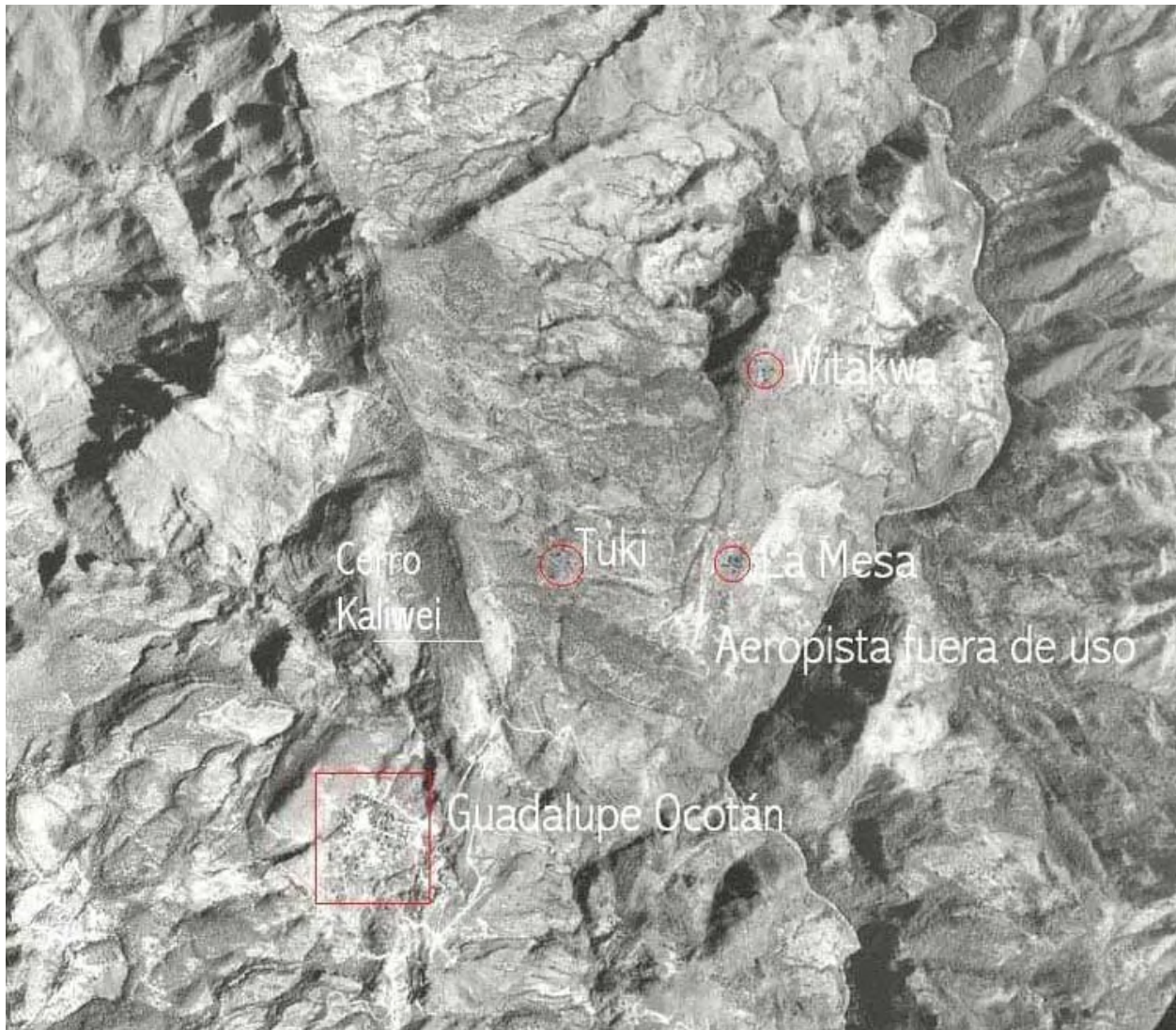


Figure 16. Detail of aerial view of Guadalupe Ocotán. After INEGI/SINFA, Zona F-13-8, Línea 117, 000 5.

The Tukipa Precinct of Xatsitsarie

In April 2001, together with a young man from the community, I was able to locate the remains of the ceremonial precinct known as Xatsitsarie, on the Cerro de Kaliwei (Kaliwei Hill) ([Figure 16](#), shown above, and [Figure 17](#), shown below). This place is two kilometers from the town of Guadalupe Ocotán, in front of what used to be the landing strip of La Mesa, which was built by the Huichol in the fifties, directed by the missionaries ([Figure 18](#) and [Figure 19](#), below). Its coordinates are 13q 0567391 (2)/UTM 2423026, at some 1,106 meters above seal level.¹²

¹² I used a Garmin 12 XL GPS to plot the coordinates, with WGS 84 as a datum.



Figure 17. The Cerro de Kaliwei (Kaliwei Hill) from outside Guadalupe Ocotán. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.



Figure 18. La Mesa seen from Cerro de Kaliwei. The Cerro de Takwatsi (Takwatsi Hill) in the background.



Figure 19. La Mesa's landing strip.



Figure 20. Ruins of the Xatsitsarie/Guadalupe Ocotán's Tuki. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

Although at present the old Tukipa is in ruins, it was regarded as one of the sacred places within the community. Therefore, the traditional authorities took some offerings to this place, which were put on a small altar facing east, made with the stones that used to be on the walls of the Tukipa ([Figure 20](#), above). In front of the ruins of this precinct, there are what used to be the patio (*Takwa*) and the remains of a *Xiriki* ([Figure 21](#), below). A few meters from this site there is a ranch that is known by the same name as the hill ([Figure 22](#), below).



Figure 21. Ruins of the Xiriki attached to Xatsitsarie's Tuki. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.



Figure 22. Rancho de Kaliwei. Close to the ceremonial precinct. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

What remains of the Tukipa's foundations suggests a round structure, with a perimeter of 26.80 m and a diameter of 7.80 m. This size suggests a rather small political-religious center, within the hierarchy of ceremonial centers. Because of its size one pole was enough to support its roof, unlike other ceremonial precincts of greater size which needed two poles. According to Miriam A. Hers (1989, 2002), the building techniques were relatively simple: the foundations consisted of a single row of rocks, on which more rocks were piled, a technique that characterized Huichol settlements after A.D. 800. The community elders stated over many years the need to rebuild this precinct and to reactivate the ceremonial hierarchy that used to take care of it.



Figure 23. Initiation of the reconstruction of Guadalupe Ocotán's Tuki. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.



Figure 24. This is how the altar looked after the Tuki's reconstruction. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

The rebuilding entails many activities imbued with a strong ceremonialism: first, the physical reconstruction of the building, under the direction of the Kawiteru and the elders, in coordination with the members of the civic-religious hierarchy and people from several *ranchos* within the community. Secondly, the necessary materials have to be procured around many points in the community. Between January 2004 and January 2005 the walls of the ceremonial precinct were built ([Figure 23](#), above), thanks to help from the *Proyectos de Apoyo a la Cultura Municipal y Comunitaria* (PACMYC) (Projects in Support of Municipal and Communal Culture). This construction took into account the original perimeter, as well as the stone altar ([Figure 24](#), above) and the foundations were removed in several places to reinforce the structure. Once the Tuki walls were completed, the central post was put in place after making an offering and a prayer directed by the Kawiteru. This post supports the roof, it is almost ten meters tall and was transported from the forests south of the community ([Figure 25](#), [Figure 26](#), [Figure 27](#), and [Figure 28](#), shown below).



Figure 25. Putting the temple's central post in place. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 26. Putting the temple's central post in place. Prayers and offerings before the post is erected in the posthole. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 27. Putting the temple's central post in place. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 28. Putting the temple's central post in place. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.

Between January and February thin trunks (known as otates) were cut down and transported to the building site; afterwards they were tied with *izote* (agave, or maguey) fiber to build the roof structure ([Figure 29](#), [Figure 30](#), [Figure 31](#), [Figure 32](#), and [Figure 33](#), shown below).



Figure 29. Temple's roof structure. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 30. Temple's roof structure. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 31. Temple's roof structure. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 32. Temple's roof structure. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 33. Temple's roof structure. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.

Later, this framework was covered with zacate (grass) which had been brought by pick-up truck or donkey ([Figure 34](#), [Figure 35](#), [Figure 36](#), [Figure 37](#), [Figure 38](#), and [Figure 39](#), shown below).¹³ The whole building process was accompanied by a simplified version of the ceremonies described by Lumholtz (1986) and Diguët (1992) at the end of the 19th century, or more recently by Neurath (1998) in Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán. Once the temple construction was over, a small hole was excavated to deposit the offerings to the ancestors. This hole is covered by a rough stone that serves provisionally as *Tepari* (a polished stone disk) ([Figure 40](#), below).



Figure 34. Building the Tuki's roof. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.

¹³ The photos illustrating this process were provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz. I should point out that I was not present during the post erection and the building of the Tuki's roof, because the dates for these activities were changed several times. Sometimes the necessary people to do the work had not arrived, since they had other engagements. Therefore, it was decided to postpone these activities to a more suitable time. Although I was unable to personally make a record of this process, several people recorded them for me in detail. Aware of my interest, Mr. Pablo Muñoz gave me the photographs taken by him and by other people with a small camera. In this way he carefully documented the building process, which would also help to prove the project's results to the PACMYC authorities.



Figure 35. Building the Tuki's roof. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 36. Building the Tuki's roof. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 37. Building the Tuki's roof. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 38. Building the Tuki's roof. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.



Figure 39. Building the Tuki's roof. Photo provided by Mr. Pablo Muñoz.

After finishing rebuilding the Tuki, a ceremony was planned to present the renovated precinct to the ancestors. However, the ceremony was postponed several times because it was not possible to find a calf for sacrifice. Finally an austere ceremony was celebrated in August 2005, but one important aspect is still pending: to define the way in which the hierarchy associated with this ceremonial precinct will be organized. Because the community has gone through a process of constant reorganization, complicated by the arrival of new families since the fifties, it will be necessary for the *Kawiteru* and the *Mara'akate* (chanters or ceremonial specialists) to perform a ceremony to "dream" (that is, to consult with the deified ancestors) how this should be done. This presents a situation that will have to be resolved through a ceremonial process, to determine if the ceremonial links between Xatsitsarie and Tateikie will be renewed, or rather if there will be a reinterpretation based on Guadalupe Ocotán's recent history.



Figure 40. Pit for placing the Tuki's offerings. Photo by Víctor M. Téllez.

These activities were affected by conflicting political and economic interests. When the word got out that financial resources were at stake, part of the people – teachers a little over forty years old, who were not in touch with ceremonial life – who had systematically opposed taking part in Guadalupe Ocotán's civic-religious hierarchy, became aware of the possibility of exploiting indigenous culture to get government financing. While the traditionalist sector was engaged in finishing the Tuki construction, they neglected the ceremonial aspect associated with selecting the members of the civic-religious hierarchy, so a teacher asked to be named *Tatuwani* (traditional ruler). The Kawiteru accepted the proposal, without consulting with the ancestors or with the community elders. In January 2005 the new *Tatuwani* and his cabinet took possession of their office, and one of their first actions was to call their ancestors and the community elders to demand money for rebuilding the Tuki, without knowing that all of the money had been used to pay for the work, which had already been completed.

Throughout the year the Tatuwani developed a new building project that modified the relatively traditional *Casa de Gobierno*, by promoting the construction of a cement structure to replace the thatched building in which were held the assemblies sponsored by the civic-religious hierarchy. However, this work was not finished because of mismanagement of the funds obtained from PACMYC. Furthermore, because of the mistakes generated by the hierarchy's lack of knowledge about ceremonial life, there has been a strong distrust on the part of the elders. This distrust was extended to the Kawiteru, who at the end of 2005 accepted as the Tatuwani's successor another teacher, who had lived outside the community for years, refusing to fulfill any religious obligation.

Since the last governors have given priority to their own personal agenda, the elders decided to postpone their project to reorganize the Tukipa district. Their idea is to influence the Kawiteru so that the ceremonial process, which determines the consensus in the civic-religious elections, is followed carefully in order to reestablish their influence on the hierarchy.

Conclusions

The present study has shown that the political and ceremonial organization in the land of the Huichol has resulted from historical processes that have affected the entire region. Therefore, the ethnographic record and oral history, within a diachronic perspective, allow us to analyze the collapse and reorganization of some ceremonial districts, such as San Sebastián Teponahuatlán (Weigand 1992). On the other hand, Guadalupe Ocotán shows certain peculiar characteristics. Like other areas within the Huichol region, Guadalupe's territory was subject to a constant process of reorganization since the 19th century, brought about by evangelization, war, territorial conflicts between states, and the reorganization of communities to form agrarian cores. Unlike other districts, which kept ceremonial links with their respective head towns (*cabeceras*), Xatsitsarie's was practically cut off from its communal matrix, and its ceremonial practices fused with those of the civic-religious hierarchy introduced by the missionaries during the colonial period.

Nowadays, the community's traditionalist sector tries to reactivate the organization of this ceremonial district, a process that started with the Tuki's reconstruction. However, this project has stumbled against political and economic interests which have favored, since the end of the fifties, the struggle between the traditionalist sector and some members of the younger generations, unfamiliar with ceremonial life. This process, together with the reorganization of ceremonial life in the context of the community and several *ranchos*, has been analyzed in the present research. This study will enable us to understand the creation of new ceremonial precincts in the context of the community, as well as in urban environments, where the indigenous population has been forming new enclaves in recent years.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge FAMSI's support, which was vital for conducting this research. The following papers have resulted from this research, or are linked to it (presented and/or published in Spanish):

"Xatsitsarie y Tutsipa: La reorganización del territorio Wixarika en el siglo XIX," (Xatsitsarie and Tutsipa: Wixarika Territorial Reorganization in the 19th Century). Paper presented in the *VI International Colloquium of Occidentalists: West Mexico, Intra- and Inter-Regional Relations*. Guadalajara, Jalisco, February 23-25, 2005.

"Contexto histórico de los conflictos agrarios en territorio huichol," (Historical Context of Agrarian Conflicts in Huichol Territory). Paper presented in the *First Meeting of Specialists on the Northern Region of Jalisco*. Colotlán, Jalisco, February 22-24, 2006.

From the first paper an article was derived, entitled "Xatsitsarie y Tutsipa: un acercamiento a la reorganización del territorio Wixarika entre los siglos XVIII y XIX," (Xatsitsarie and Tutsipa: a look at Wixarika Territorial Reorganization during the 18th and 19th Centuries), to be published in the *Proceedings of the VI International Colloquium of Occidentalists: West Mexico, Intra- and Inter-Regional Relations*. (In press).

The research I conducted with FAMSI's support enabled me to delve deeply into some aspects and revise some ideas presented in my doctoral dissertation (entitled *Territorio, gobierno local y ritual en Xatsitsarie/Guadalupe Ocotán*). On the basis of this research I have reworked some chapters of the thesis, focused on the reorganization of ceremonial life, and written some papers presented this year (2006) in the Regional Museum of Anthropology and History of Tepic, Nayarit, in the Northern University Center of the University of Guadalajara, and in the Center for Anthropological Research, Colegio de Michoacán. This material has been reorganized in the following articles:

"La organización política y territorial de los Nayaritas hacia la primera mitad del siglo XVI," (The Political and Territorial Organization of the Nayarita in the First Half of the 16th Century). (This article has been finished and will be submitted to the INAH Center of Nayarit).

"La Casa del Tonati: Organización política y ceremonial de los Nayaritas durante el periodo colonial (1542-1722)," (The House of the Tonati: Nayarita Political and Ceremonial Organization During the Colonial Period [1542-1722]). (This article has been finished and will be submitted to the INAH Center of Nayarit).

"Evangelización y reterritorialización de la Zona Nayarita," (Evangelization and Re-territorialization of the Nayarita Area). (This article has been finished and will be submitted to the INAH Center of Nayarit).

"Xatsitsarie y Tutsipa: un acercamiento a la reorganización del territorio Wixarika entre los siglos XVIII y XIX," (Xatsitsarie and Tutsipa: A Look at Wixarika Territorial Organization in the 18th and 19th Centuries). (In press).

"Transformaciones del gobierno indígena y los sistemas de cargos entre los Wixaritari," (Transformations of Indigenous Government and Cargo Systems among the Wixaritari). (In process).

"La jerarquía cívico-religiosa de Guadalupe Ocotán como un sistema de transición," (Guadalupe Ocotán's Civic-Religious Hierarchy as a Transition System). (In preparation).

I would like to reiterate my gratitude to FAMSI for its support, and please do not hesitate to contact me in case of any doubts or comments about this report.



Figure 41. Ceremonial precinct. The Drum Feast in Witakwa/La Mesa.

Appendix

Ceremonial precincts derived from Xatsitsarie's Tuki.

In Guadalupe Ocotán there were at least two ceremonial precincts with a Tuki-like design: the first one was located at Witakwa/La Mesa. As stated earlier, for some years it served as ceremonial center for this district. Currently it retains its prestige as one of the oldest and most important ceremonial precincts, although only an extended family from the original *ranchería* (i.e. small rural settlement) of Witakwa/La Mesa congregates ([Figure 41](#), shown above). The second ceremonial precinct with a Tuki-like design is El Olote, a small *rancho* (hamlet) located in the Cerro de Kaliwei, at a distance of less than one kilometer from the old Tukipa of Xatsitsarie, toward the west.¹⁴ Until some years

¹⁴ The coordinates for this site are: 13q 0566858/UTM 2423063, and is at some 1,213 meters above sea level.

ago there was a family shrine (*Xiriki*) which apparently congregated a large extended family.



Figure 42. The shrine or *Tuki* at El Olote.

The circular shape and size of this shrine, perhaps influenced by the proximity of the old Tukipa, suggest that at some point it must have gone through an expansion process that made it to be recognized as a big *Xiriki* or a small *Tuki* ([Figure 42](#), above). In 2001 this shrine was in disrepair, since the grass roof had not been renovated. Within the structure there was an altar made with twigs, where the ceremonial drums rested

([Figure 43](#), below). The roof incorporated several arrows and ojos de *Dios* ("God's eyes," a traditional cross-like ritual artifact made with twigs and yarn) used in the feasts. This precinct was used until a few years ago, and later was gradually abandoned. The families gathered around the shrine were established in the main town, where they decided to build a new Xiriki.¹⁵ At present this precinct has disappeared ([Figure 44](#), below), and the rocks that made up its walls, together with the houses that surrounded it, were used for building fences and other houses.



Figure 43. Interior of Xiriki showing Tuki-like altar.

¹⁵ This is not a new process in Guadalupe Ocotán's history. Starting in the fifties and sixties, some *ranchos* were partially or definitively abandoned, and the people settled in the head town of Guadalupe Ocotán, attracted by the services introduced by the missionaries and the Mexican government (education, running water, electricity, etc.).



Figure 44. Remains of precinct no longer extant at El Olote ruin.

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