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Historical Archaeology and Indigenous Identity at the Ex-Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla, Atlixco, Puebla, México

Research Year: 2006

Culture: Nahua

Chronology: Colonial to Contemporary

Location: Puebla, México

Site: San Miguel Acocotla, Atlixco

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Dr. Harold Juli
At the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla, June 2004

On Saturday, February 10th, 2007, Harold D. Juli, Ph.D. died at the age of 59 after an eight-month battle with cancer. His loss was a deeply-felt blow to members of the project, the students who worked with him in both México and the United States, and to the people of the village of La Soledad Morelos. Harold brought an unmatched enthusiasm not only for his research, but also for teaching his students and the general public. In this spirit, we continue the project.

The following report is dedicated to his memory, with great respect for the example Harold set as archaeologist, mentor, teacher and friend.

Abstract

This report describes a second season of archaeological research at the ex-hacienda San Miguel Acocotla, Atlixco, Puebla, México. During the last five years, the project has used a multi-disciplinary approach, documentary, ethnographic and archaeological, to investigate the lives of the indigenous workers who toiled on this estate from 1577 to the Mexican Revolution. Significant numbers of Mexican hacienda-based peasants, largely invisible in the historic documentary sources, have emerged from a background of indigenous culture, in this case a *Nahua* heritage. The project seeks to reconstruct indigenous identity through archaeological signatures of material culture linked to continuities in a descendant community. The approach articulates with current theoretical themes in subaltern Latin American studies, dominance/resistance and ethnicity.

Resumen

Arqueología histórica e identidad indígena en la ex-hacienda de San Miguel Acocotla, Atlixco, Puebla, México

Este informe describe una segunda etapa de investigación en la ex-hacienda San Miguel Acocotla, Atlixco, Puebla, México. Por los últimos cinco años el proyecto ha empleado un abordaje multidisciplinario, documental, etnográfico y arqueológico para investigar la vida de los peones indígenas que trabajaron arduamente en esta propiedad desde 1577 hasta la Revolución Mexicana. Un número significativo de campesinos mexicanos, básicamente invisibles en las fuentes documentales históricas, ha surgido de un trasfondo de cultural indígena, en este caso de una herencia *Nahua*. El proyecto propone reconstruir la identidad del trabajador indígena a través de firmas arqueológicas de la cultura material relacionadas con las comunidades contemporáneas de sus descendientes. Este acercamiento se articula con temas teóricos actuales en estudios latinoamericanos subalternos, la arqueología de la dominación/resistencia y la etnicidad.

Introduction: Historical Archaeology in México

During the last two decades, studies of México's past have witnessed the expansion of historical archaeology as a new field that parallels and connects with archaeology's traditional focus on the rich pre-Columbian heritage (Alexander 2004, Charlton 1986, Fernández Dávila and Gómez Serafín 1998, Fournier and Miranda-Flores 1992, Palka 2005, Zeitlin 2005). The perspectives afforded by historical archaeologists have been integrated into research designs that go beyond Contact-period studies and embrace the Colonial period, the 19th century, and rural and urban problem-oriented projects with various emphases including ethnoarchaeology (Gasco, Smith, and Fournier-García 1997). Recently, the archaeology of haciendas has signaled the beginning of a new sub-field that can be connected to emerging interests in theory and understanding continuities and change among indigenous peoples during historic periods.

The Mexican Hacienda: History and Archaeology

The hacienda is well known through historical literature and cultural stereotypes associated with wealthy landowners from the Colonial through Revolutionary periods throughout Latin America. Commonly considered a large estate, haciendas were “operated by a dominant landowner and a dependent labor force, organized to supply a small-scale market by means of scarce capital accumulation but also to support the status aspirations of the owner” (Wolf and Mintz 1957). Some haciendas were enormous landholding fiefdoms whose structure and labor force paralleled New World plantations, although hacienda workers were not legally slaves (Gonzalez Sanchez 1997); however, due to many factors, including debt peonage, indigenous hacienda peons led lives similar to those of plantation slaves in the Caribbean and southern United States (Meyers and Carlson 2002).

In México, the hacienda has long been a focus of historical research, leaving no doubt as to the importance of the institution in Mexican history, economy, and society (e.g. Brannon and Joseph 1991, Chance 2003, Chevalier 1963, Jarquín et al. 1990, Morner 1973, Taylor 1972, Van Young 1983). As such research has shown, the Mexican hacienda was more than simply a large agricultural estate. With the establishment of each new hacienda came a social and physical reordering of an ancient landscape. The hacienda system brought European conquerors and indigenous conquered into daily contact and provided a locus for the generation and institutionalization of new class, ethnic and racial identities. As such, the Hacienda lends itself well to anthropological investigation, as evidenced by the growing number of archaeological projects in several regions.

Recently, Mexican hacienda research has produced a small, but growing number of archaeological or archaeologically-related studies as this sub-field begins its definitional stage (Alexander 2004, Benavides 1985, Meyers 2005, Meyers and Carlson 2002). An important distinguishing attribute of these investigations has been their strong anthropological problem orientation (Alexander 1997, Fournier-Garcia 1997, Fournier-Garcia and Mondragon 2003) that can be grouped into three types: studies that are historically based, but archaeologically relevant, in that they describe events and processes of hacienda development with linkages to broader cultural patterns; studies of hacienda archaeological settlement patterns; and studies with an excavation focus.

David Jones' study (1981), *The Importance of the Hacienda in 19th Century Otumba and Apan, Basin of México*, is an example of an archaeologically relevant, documentary study explicating the relationship of haciendas to a variety of rural settlement types in Central México from the conquest to the twentieth century. Jones focused on the rise and decline of regional haciendas and other settlements, specifically regarding political, economic and social processes. Similarly, Fournier-Garcia and Mondragon's recent study (2003) of haciendas and ranchos in Hidalgo's Mezquital Valley also uses documentary information and ethnoarchaeology to understand the indigenous Otomi response to the development of haciendas. Along with archival information, ethnoarchaeology is included as a research strategy which perhaps anticipates an emerging direction in future hacienda research designs (Juli 2003).

The second group of studies has focused on archaeological settlement patterns and their relationship to either historical processes or surveys designed to understand hacienda physical features and preservation. Thomas Charlton's long-term project on historic period settlement in the Teotihuacán Valley, and specifically his study of haciendas and their relationship to rural settlement types and issues of land tenure (Charlton 1986) is one such study. Rani Alexander's (Alexander 1997, Alexander 2004) study of hacienda settlement patterns in the Yucatán provides another excellent example. Alexander used an archaeological model of rural settlements including haciendas to understand the dynamics of indigenous population shifts prior to the Caste War of 1847.

The third focus in hacienda archaeology is the recent initiation of traditional excavation-based research. One such on-going project is based in Yucatán at the hacienda Tabi (Meyers 2001). To date, this multi-year project has focused on architecturally-based excavations to analyze the changing houses and landscapes of hacienda workers. The goal is to understand the dynamics of power relations and social inequality between *hacendados*, managers and workers (Meyers and Carlson 2002).

Thus far, Hacienda archaeology has not developed a single theoretical orientation, although as mentioned above, many studies have been explicitly problem-oriented (Alexander 1997, Meyers and Carlson 2002). Clearly, while it is possible for these studies to follow several research directions, the majority of archaeological work so far has tended to focus on the lives of hacienda workers (*peones*), their physical living conditions, associated architecture, and their relations to the hierarchy of resident managers and *hacendados* (Alexander 1997, Meyers and Carlson 2002). In addition, as Charlton has recently written (2003), another contribution of hacienda archaeology is its potential to provide material perspectives on documentary sources and interpretations that have for so long defined hacienda studies. Archaeological work permits reassessment of historical interpretations (Alexander 1997, Alexander 2003), and affords us new views of the physical makeup and living conditions of haciendas and their *peones* often invisible in traditional written sources.

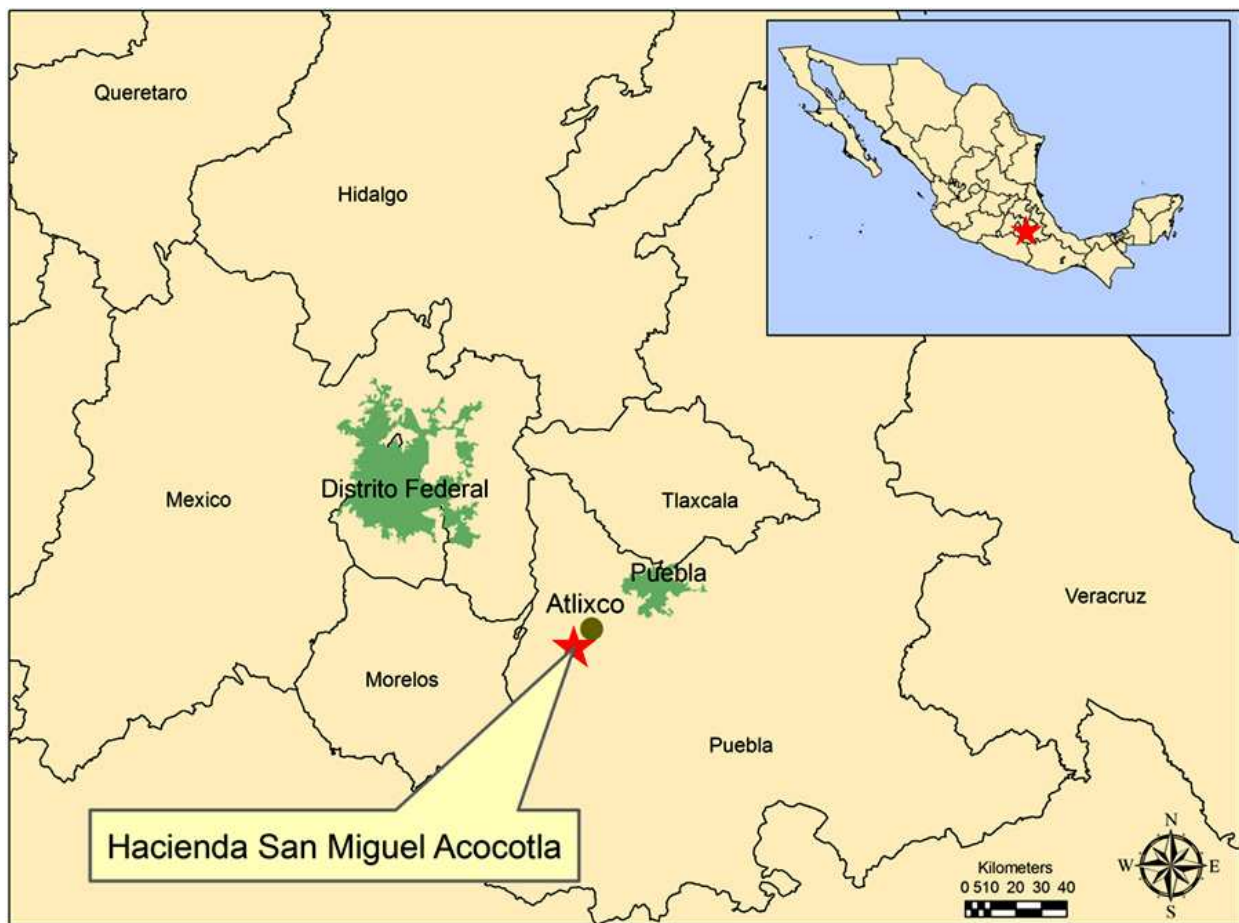


Figure 1. Map showing location of San Miguel Acocotla (ESRI Data and Maps 2007—México [map]. 1:1,777,816. Redlands, CA: Environmental Systems Research Institute. Available: SUNY-Stonybrook Library Controlled Access Using: ArcView GIS [GIS software]. Version 9.2. Redlands, CA: Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc.)

The Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla: Archaeology and Ethnoarchaeology

The hacienda San Miguel Acocotla is located centrally in the valley of Atlixco, Puebla about 10 kilometers southwest of Atlixco's city center ([Figure 1](#)) and at approximately 1800 meters above sea level. The valley itself is composed of agricultural land located east of a line of hills running south from the summit of the Popocateptl volcano, which is clearly visible throughout the valley. This region has been settled for millennia (Plunket 1990). When founded in 1577 by Lucas Perez Madonado, the Hacienda Acocotla represented a new social order in a landscape that had been occupied for thousands of years. It functioned as an institution for some 370 years until the period following the Mexican Revolution when Acocotla's lands began to be sold. During this period, México's agrarian reforms enabled members of the surrounding villages to purchase the lands of the former hacienda. The final parcels were bought by several dozen peasant farmers in 1946. The closest village, La Soledad Morelos, is located 2 kilometers to the south of Acocotla and is a community of descendants of the Hacienda's workers

(*jornaleros* and *peones encasillados*), and today, members of the village own most of the land to the south of the Hacienda, as well as the Hacienda ruins themselves. To the west of the Hacienda is the village of Tejupa, to the east, La Trinidad Topango and San Jerónimo Coyula is located to the north. Members of these villages own smaller parcels of land surrounding the hacienda ruins.

From its 16th century origin to its final breakup in 1946, 22 different owners controlled commerce and life at Acocotla. Documentary research suggests that in the early 20th century, as well as throughout the earlier centuries of occupation, Acocotla was a medium sized hacienda within this region. The land's value in 1921 was \$42,500, clearly in the midrange of value compared to other nearby haciendas. Acocotla had an agriculturally-based economy, growing primarily wheat, but also maize, beans, chiles, jicama and peanuts. Fruit trees and small-scale stock raising, primarily cattle and goats, were also elements of the hacienda's economy.

For the last several years, we have been investigating the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla and its surrounding villages. During this project's initial phase, Dr. Juli conducted an informal visual survey of ten haciendas in the Puebla and Tlaxcala region to develop an understanding of the nature of regional settlement patterns, site preservation, and their potential for archaeological and ethnographic research. As a result, Dr. Juli identified San Miguel Acocotla near Atlixco as an excellent candidate for research. This abandoned hacienda possesses many of the classic features of the regional form. While the main house (*casco*) is not in a good state of preservation, the area of worker housing, the *calpanería*, along the hacienda's main south wall ([Figure 2](#)), was sufficiently well-preserved to suggest that a profitable archaeological study would be feasible. This zone is comprised of 37 small adobe rooms, adjacent to a fallow field that was the area of worker housing and domestic activities during at least the 19th and 20th centuries, if not during the earlier colonial era as well.

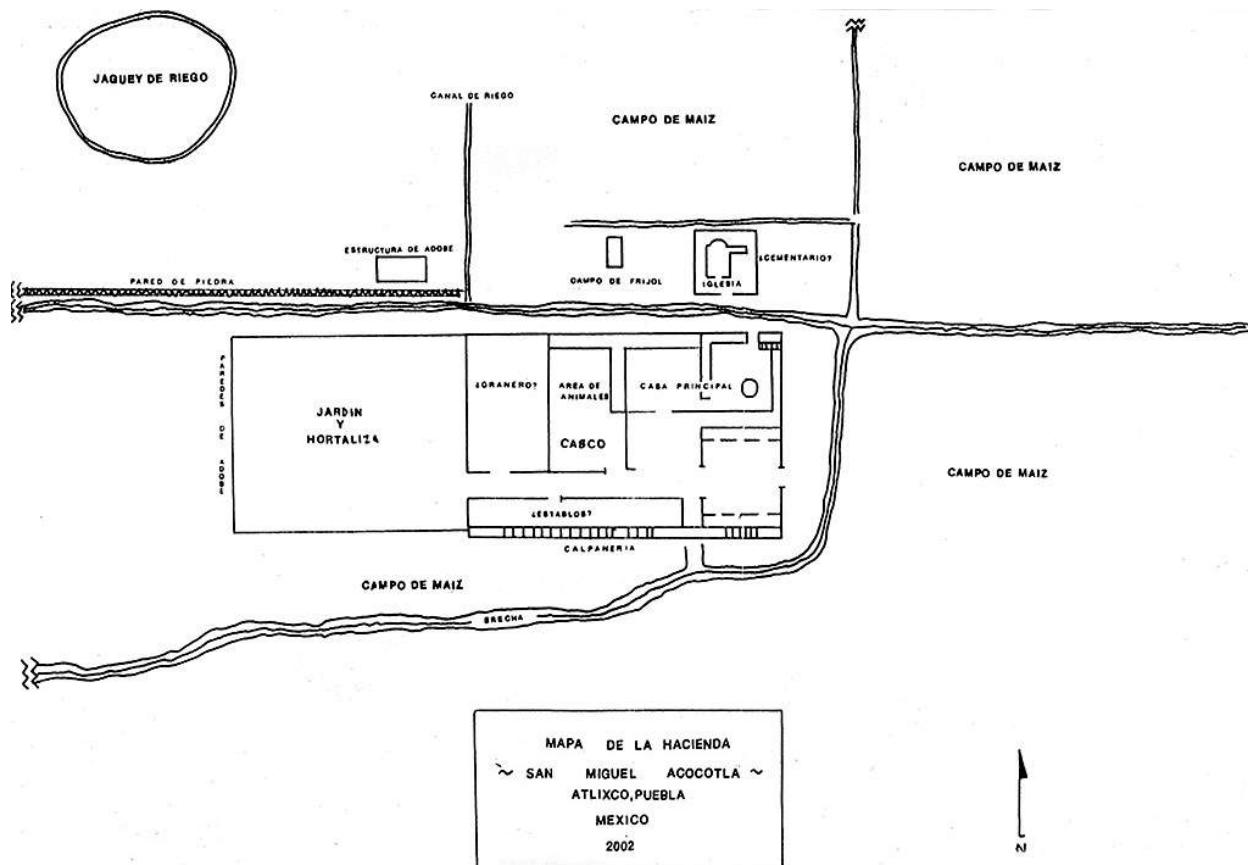


Figure 2. Drawing of San Miguel Acocotla.

Paralleling Dr. Juli's survey work, a student in the Anthropology Department at the University of the Americas-Puebla, Mary Carmen Romano, began intensive archival research on the Acocotla documents located in public archives in Atlixco, Puebla and México City. This research has provided a strong body of information on the history of the hacienda. While it is clear that most records do not pertain to the daily life and working conditions of the *peones*, this population can be seen historically in worker employment lists which include information on their level of literacy, whether they spoke *Nahuatl* (Mexicano) or Spanish, their marital status, age, education levels and health (Romano 2005).

During the summers of 2003-2005, Dr. Juli conducted ethnoarchaeological research in La Soledad Morelos (population 2100) with Mexican anthropology students from the University of the Americas-Puebla. While interviewing the people who now own and work in the fields around Acocotla, Dr. Juli encountered evidence of strong oral traditions about the hacienda focusing on the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These interviews led to the realization that the village of La Soledad Morelos, two kilometers to the south of Acocotla, is home to many descendants of the Hacienda's *peones*. Today, many people in this small village live in traditional adobe houses, surrounded by domestic house compounds, some of which are very similar to the architecture of

Acocotla's *calpanería*, or worker housing. This descendant community, therefore, provided a perfect site for an ethnoarchaeological study of daily life, architecture and house compounds, because these contemporary patterns suggested strong analogies to the form and function of 19th and 20th century *calpanería* architecture and activities at Acocotla.

Research Problem

With the emergence of recent anthropological interest in Mexican haciendas, the research agenda to date has focused on the lives of the peasant workers who toiled on these estates for almost 400 years from the 16th-20th centuries (Alexander 2004, Juli 2003, Meyers and Carlson 2002). Research focusing on the lives of common people articulates with several current disciplinary agendas in historical archaeology, including studies of subaltern groups in Latin America (Rodríguez 2001), the emergence of plantation and slave archaeology in the Southern U.S. and Caribbean (Singleton 1985) and studies in the archaeology of inequality, as manifest in the historical archaeological and documentary records (McGuire and Paynter 1991a). In the Mexican context, archaeological study of hacienda worker also contributes new information to understanding the transitions from indigenous to *mestizo* identity as experienced by some communities of rural people, who, by the early 20th century, had ceased to speak *Nahuatl*, had adopted Catholic beliefs and had shifted their identities from indigenous to more mainstream national forms.

Documentary Research

During the last four years, research based in archives in Puebla (Archivo General de Notarías del Estado de Puebla, Archivo del Registro Agrario del Estado de Puebla) and México (Archivo del Centro de Estudios de Historia de México) has resulted in an accumulated body of materials to document Acocotla's history, as well as to examine the visibility of worker life in these records. The lives of the hacienda workers typically come to light in documents such as [Table 1](#) dating to 1893, a list of 56 individuals of indigenous identity (and *Nahuatl* speakers), ranging from 1-61 years of age, who worked at Acocotla. While much has been written about elite hacienda life through the centuries (Chevalier 1963), other than lists of workers, details of crimes, or accounts of worker debt (Nickel 1988), little in Acocotla's documentary record describes the lives of its worker population.

Table 1. Workers from San Miguel Acocotla, May 23rd, 1893

No.	Nombre y Apellido	Fecha de inscripción	Sexo	Edad	Estado	Religión	Nacionalidad	Sabe leer	Idioma	Ejercicio	Defectos	¿Están vacunados?	Tuvo viruela	Raza	Lugar de residencia anterior
1	Nicolás Espíritu	Mayo 22	H	45	Casado	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
2	Ma. Rafaela	Mayo 22	M	30	Casada	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
3	Cruz Espíritu	Mayo 22	H	18	Soltero	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
4	Ángel Espíritu	Mayo 22	H	16	Soltero	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
5	Domingo Espíritu	Mayo 22	H	14	Niño	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
6	Ma. Ángela Dominga	Mayo 22	M	12	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
7	Martín Espíritu	Mayo 22	M	7	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
8	Ma. Petra	Mayo 22	M	2	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
9	Antonio de Jesús	Mayo 22	H	30	Viudo	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Coyula
10	Ma. Flora	Mayo 22	M	30	Casada	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Tepeojuma
11	Ma. Remijia	Mayo 22	M	1	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Tepeojuma
12	Caciano Rojas	Mayo 22	H	28	Casado	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Mexatla
13	Ma. Lorenza de Jesús	Mayo 23	M	25	Casada	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Mexatla
14	Ma. Macedonia de Jesús	Mayo 23	M	6m.	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Mexatla
15	Antonio Tonantzintla	Mayo 23	H	35	Soltero	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
16	Ma. Hipólita	Mayo 23	M	60	Viuda	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
17	Rafael Tonantzintla	Mayo 23	H	8	Niño	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
18	Ma. Juana de la Luz	Mayo 23	M	35	Viuda	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Santo Domingo
19	Luciano de Jesús	Mayo 23	H	12	Niño	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Santo Domingo
20	Tomás de Jesús	Mayo 23	H	8	Niño	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Santo Domingo
21	Norberto Salgado	Mayo 23	H	40	Casado	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Hacienda de Sabana
22	Feliciana Segunda	Mayo 23	M	38	Casada	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Hacienda de Sabana
23	Juana Salgado	Mayo 23	M	18	Soltera	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Hacienda de Sabana
24	Ascensión Salgado	Mayo 23	H	1	Niño	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
25	Mateo de Jesús	Mayo 23	H	25	Casado	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	San Juan Coaco
26	Ma. de los Santos	Mayo 23	M	20	Casada	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	San Juan Coaco
27	María de Jesús	Mayo 23	M	50	Viuda	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	San Juan Coaco
28	Vicente de Jesús	Mayo 23	H	10	Niño	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	San Juan Coaco
29	Pedro Santos	Mayo 23	H	41	Casado	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
30	Ma. Basilio	Mayo 23	M	32	Casada	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa

No.	Nombre y Apellido	Fecha de inscripción	Sexo	Edad	Estado	Religión	Nacionalidad	Sabe leer	Idioma	Ejercicio	Defectos	¿Están vacunados?	Tuvo viruela	Raza	Lugar de residencia anterior
31	José Librado	Mayo 23	H	6	Niño	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
32	José Clemente	Mayo 23	H	61	Viudo	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
33	José Tiburcio	Mayo 23	H	24	Soltero	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
34	Ma. Dionicia	Mayo 23	M	22	Soltera	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	-	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
35	José Octaviano	Mayo 23	H	17	Soltero	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
36	Ma. Bruna	Mayo 23	M	13	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
37	José Mateo	Mayo 23	H	10	Niño	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
38	Ma. Fermina	Mayo 23	M	20	Soltera	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
39	Ma. Petra	Mayo 23	M	1	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
40	Dolores Rojas	Mayo 23	H	28	Casado	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
41	Ma. de Jesús	Mayo 23	M	25	Casada	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
42	Jesús Rojas	Mayo 23	H	4	Niño	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Huexocuapa
43	Rafael González	Mayo 23	H	38	Casado	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
44	Ma. Joaquina Arenas	Mayo 23	M	33	Casada	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
45	Miguel Hernández	Mayo 23	H	73	Casado	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Campista	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Hacienda San Lorenzo
46	Cleofas Pérez	Mayo 23	M	55	Casada	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Hacienda San Lorenzo
47	Soledad Hernández	Mayo 23	M	18	Soltera	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Hacienda San Lorenzo
48	Dolores Salgado	Mayo 23	M	18	Soltera	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Hacienda San Lorenzo
49	Ysabel Miranda	Mayo 23	M	9	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Hacienda San Lorenzo
50	Sesilia Salgado	Mayo 23	M	4	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
51	Ma. Carmen Salgado	Mayo 23	M	1	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla
52	Ma. Bárbara Gabriel	Mayo 23	M	58	Viuda	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Puebla
53	Francisco Juárez	Mayo 23	H	30	Soltero	Católico	Mexicano	No	Mexicano	Jornalero	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Puebla
54	Ma. Bernarda López	Mayo 23	M	31	Soltera	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	Tuvo	Indígena	Puebla
55	Lorenza Nieves	Mayo 23	M	8	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Puebla
56	Ma. Seberiana Romero	Mayo 23	M	1	Niña	Católica	Mexicana	No	Mexicano	-	Ninguno	No está	No tuvo	Indígena	Acocotla

Ethnoarchaeology and Oral Tradition

To supplement the limited information on worker life in the archival sources on Acocotla, Dr. Juli conducted an ethnoarchaeological project in La Soledad Morelos during the summers of 2003-2005. La Soledad Morelos is a small village 2 kilometers from the Hacienda, now inhabited by descendants of Acocotla's workers, who, today, identify as culturally *mestizo* and speak only Spanish. The first phase of research produced a typology of traditional adobe architecture and domestic house compounds still inhabited by about 10 percent of the villagers ([Figure 3](#)). In the second phase (2004), the internal configurations of these traditional house compounds were mapped, along with the collection of data on daily life, use of space, and oral traditions about the hacienda. [Figure 4](#) shows the internal details of architectural type 2 the "Fila form" which presents the strongest analogy to the surviving architecture at Acocotla's *calpanería*. Dr. Juli continued these studies during the summer of 2005.

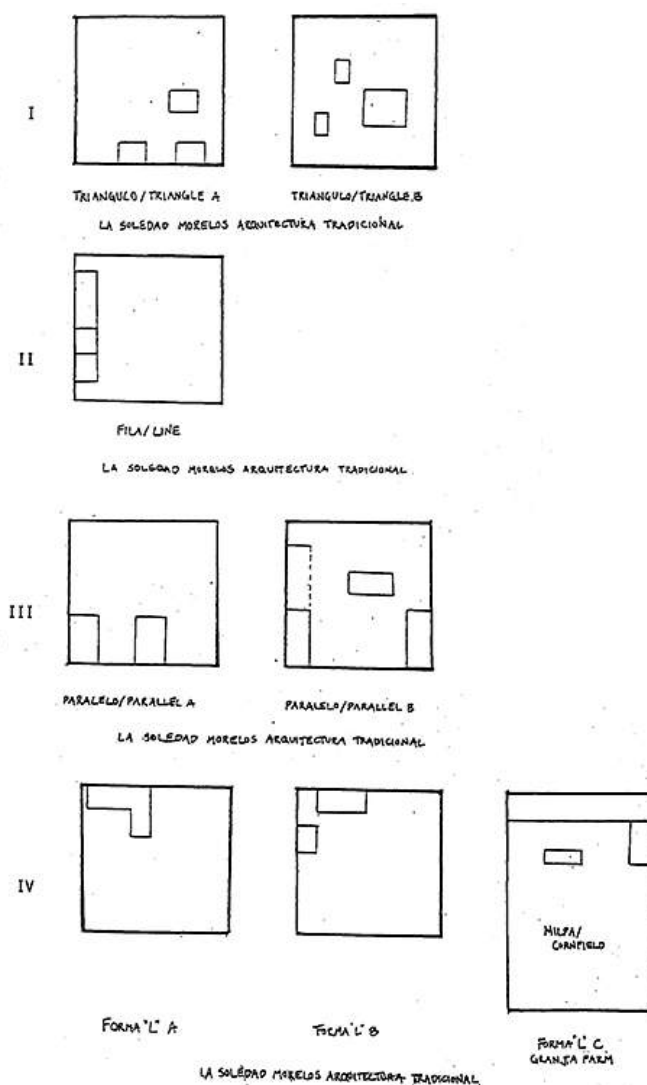


Figure 3. Compound Types in La Soledad Morelos.

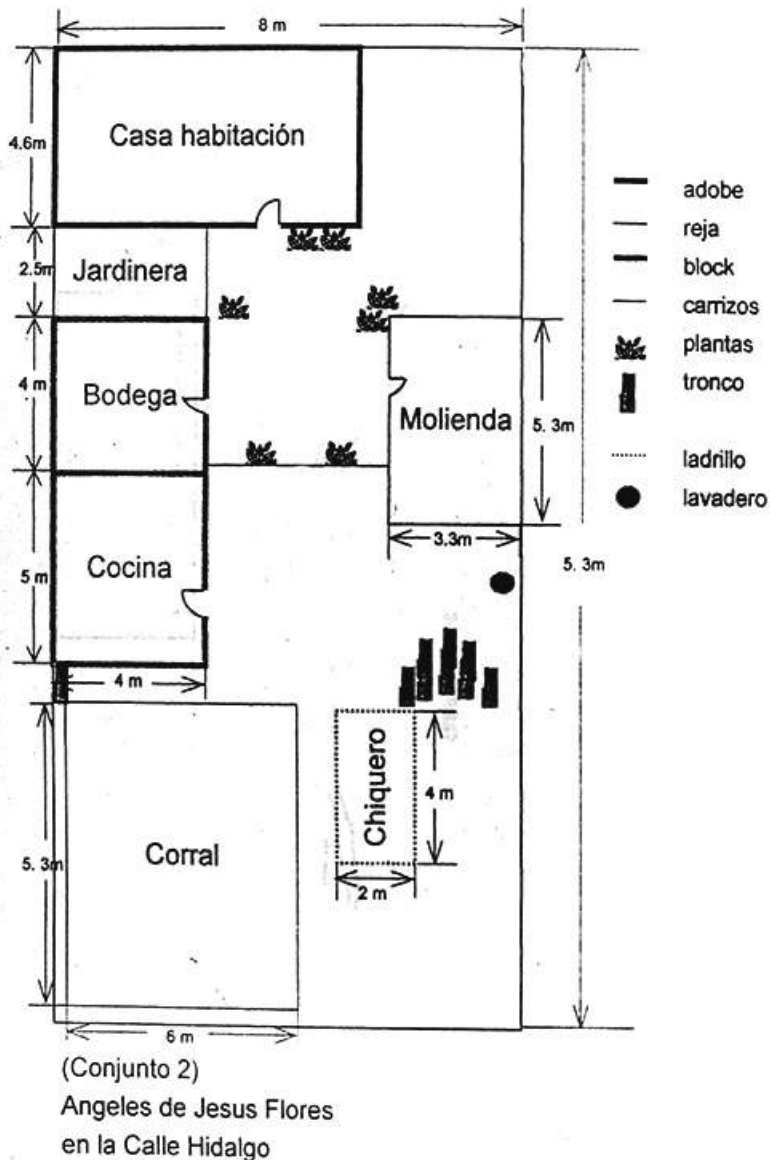


Figure 4. Detail of Fila Type Compound.

Elizabeth Terese Newman is in the process of beginning parallel investigations in the village of San Jerónimo Coyula. Coyula is located approximately 5 kilometers north of the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla and, like La Soledad Morelos, supplied both day and residential workers to the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla. Unlike La Soledad Morelos, however, residents of Coyula still commonly speak *Nahuatl* and identify culturally as indigenous. Thus far, we have identified five individuals living in Coyula today who worked on the Hacienda Acocotla as very young children. We are currently beginning to collect life histories from these individuals in *Nahuatl*. Initial ethnographic investigation indicates that ethnoarchaeological investigations in Coyula will provide a fascinating juxtaposition to completed archaeological research at the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla and ethnoarchaeological research conducted by Dr. Juli in the *mestizo* community of La Soledad Morelos.

The Calpanería of Acocotla

The southern wall of the main hacienda structure is the location of the *calpanería*, the area containing remains of small adobe worker housing ([Figure 2](#)). This zone consists of a parallel row of 37 small structures encompassing most of the hacienda's main outer wall, on both sides of the principal entrance ([Photograph 1](#)). Documents from the archives in Atlixco, Puebla, México indicate that the *calpanería* as we see it today was built in 1850. The typical adobe structure is 3.50 meters wide, 3.50 meters in depth and 2.50-3.0 meters in height from the floor to the location of roof rafters along the back wall. There is some variation in the preservation of these adobe structures. Most retain only side and back walls which sit on a stone foundation. No roofs have survived ([Photograph 2](#)). Two structures have surviving front adobe wall, showing the location of the door opening ([Photograph 3](#)). In front of the adobe structures in the *calpanería*, there is an empty field, formerly used for maize cultivation. This field is 300 meters long (west to east) and 55 meters wide (north to south).



Photograph 1. *Calpanería* and Main Entrance.

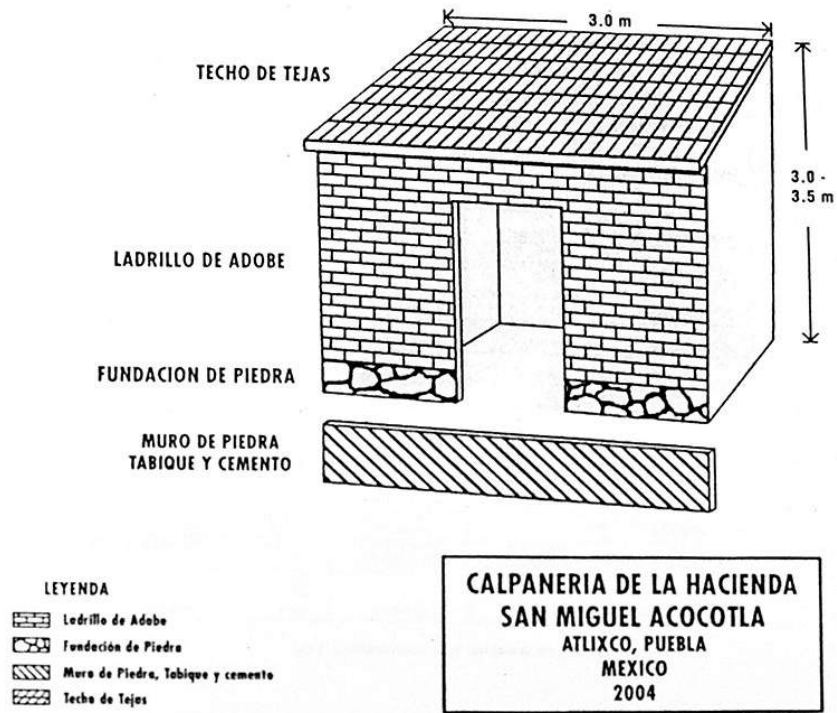


Figure 5. Reconstruction of *Calpanería* Room.



Photograph 2. *Calpanería* Room.



Photograph 3. *Calpanería* Room, well-preserved example.

Summary of Previous Excavation—Summer 2005

During the summer of 2005, Dr. Harold Juli and Elizabeth Terese Newman directed four weeks of exploratory archaeological investigations at the *calpanería* of the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla. The initial activity was a program of architectural mapping of the *calpanería* rooms. After removing vegetation, we found that the *calpanería* consists of 37 identical room forms (3.5m x 3.5m). From this point forward, we concentrated our research on the 28 rooms on the west side of the hacienda's entrance (there are a remaining nine to the east of the entrance). We mapped and described the architecture of 10 of the rooms in this section in detail. The typical *calpanería* room is 3.5m x 3.5m in length and width and 3.5 meters high along the back wall.

After completing the *calpanería* mapping, we initiated a transect survey of the entire field in front of the *calpanería*. Oral traditions of the *calpanería* surviving among elderly residents of the descendant peon village of La Soledad Morelos indicated that the field in front of the *calpanería* had been used for domestic activities by the resident peons when the hacienda was in operation. After cleaning the vegetation, it became evident that a significant distribution of ceramic and glass artifacts existed across the field. We mapped the concentrations along 13 transects to provide guidance for the positioning of excavation units in subsequent seasons ([Figure 6](#)). Most of the materials proved to be domestic redwares, bottle glass and an assortment of other materials including the occasional mayolica, as well as some pre-Colombian ceramics. The artifacts from the transect analysis date primarily to the 19th and early 20th centuries. The greatest concentration of artifacts was recovered from the center of the field.

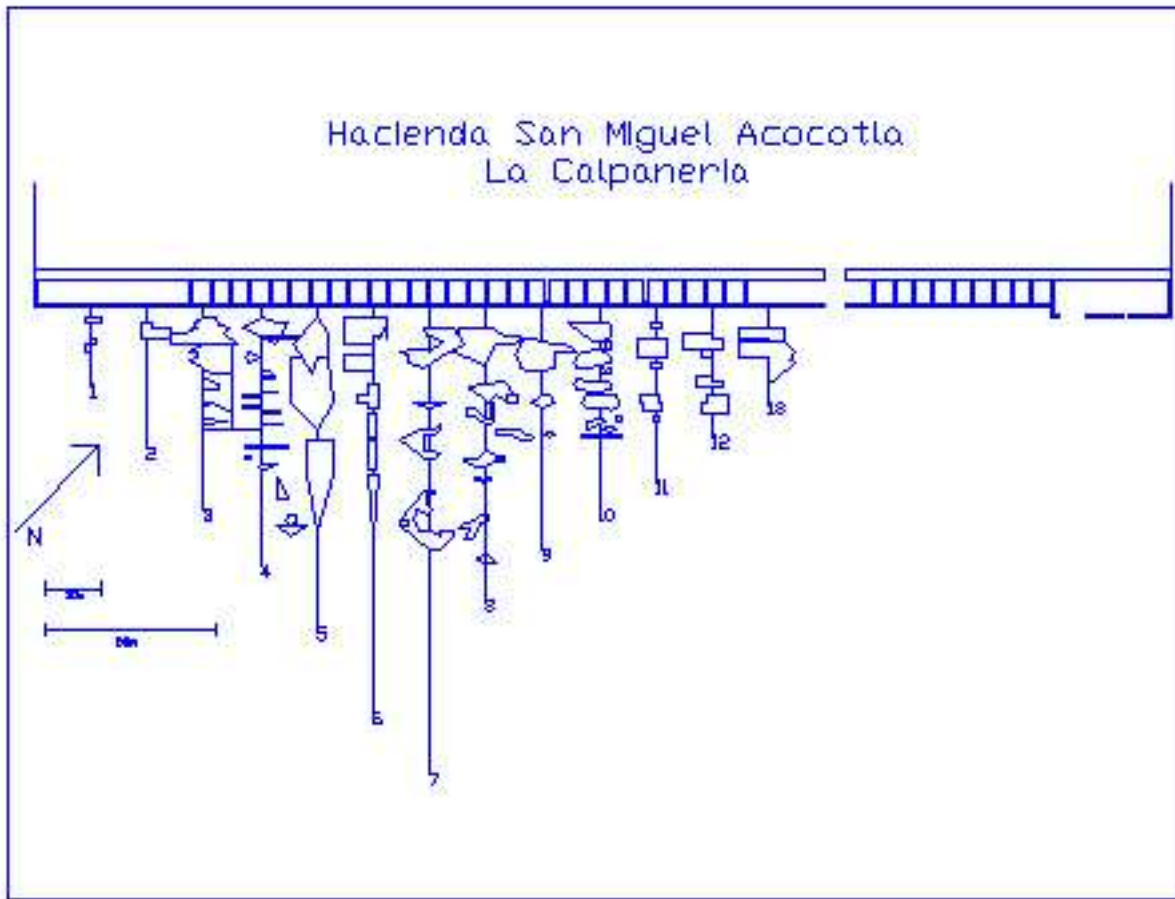


Figure 6. Transects and Concentrations; Season 2005.

Following the completion of the transect survey, we opened 5 one meter by one meter test units in the field fronting the *calpanería* (Figure 7) so that we could explore the nature of the stratigraphy and understand the depth and degree of artifact disturbance in the plow zone. The five test units were placed judgmentally based on results from our transect survey. We excavated the units in 10cm levels to define the plow zone artifact distributions and overall stratigraphy to a depth where we encountered *tepetate* (naturally deposited glacial till). In most units, *tepetate* was encountered from 60cm to almost 1m in depth. As the excavations progressed, we expanded two productive units with 1m x 1m additions that were numbered consecutively as they were opened. Test unit #3 had two additions, #6 to the west and #8 to the south while unit #5 had an addition to the west (#7) and one to the east (#9). The depth of the plow zone varied across the field but in general, we felt that it was shallow enough that major unplowed sub-surface areas lacked this disturbance.

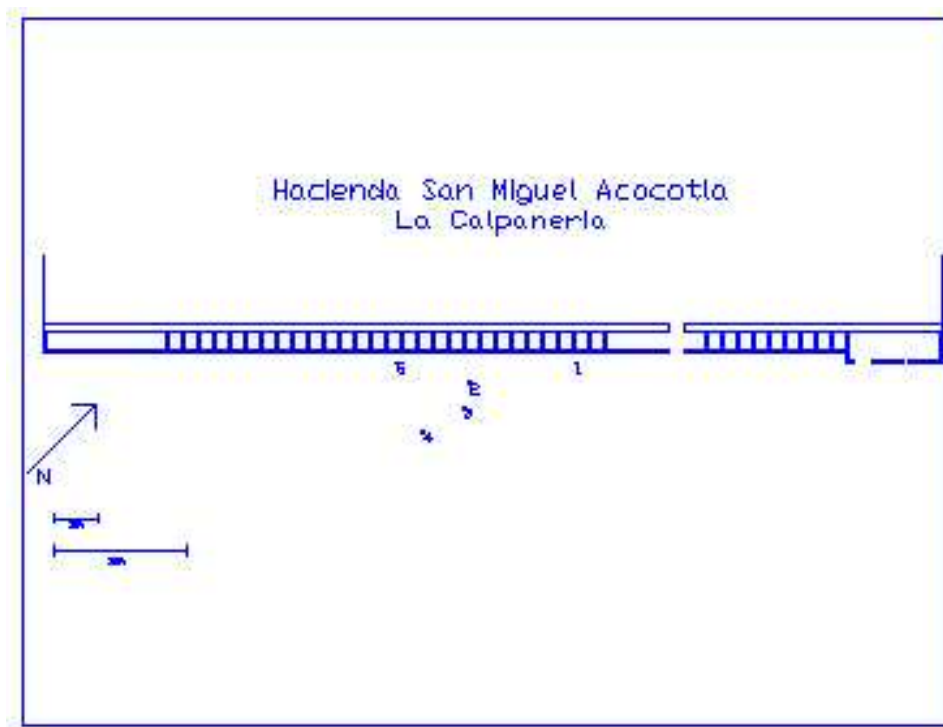


Figure 7. Test Units; Season 2005.

The test units consistently produced artifacts consisting of historic ceramics, glass, metal and plastic in levels 1 and 2 (a full artifact analysis may be found in Juli et al. (2006)). In sum, the materials largely consist of late 19th and early 20th century domestic ceramics and glass. There is some earlier mayolica present in small amounts. Interestingly, there is also a scatter of pre-Colombian materials across the field whose diagnostic types indicate a temporal frame of the first several centuries A.D.

Toward the end of the 2005 season, we were able to begin the excavation of one of the *calpanería* rooms (Room 21). In this unit, we divided the interior surface area into 4 quadrants and began the excavation of the northwest and southeast sections. We found a variety of materials. Ceramics included *rojo alisado*, *rojo bruñido*, *vidriado*, *mayolica* and *loza blanca*. Vessel forms included comals, cazuelas, braseros, ollas and molcajetes, indicating that the rooms of the *calpanería* were possibly used for cooking. In addition to ceramics, we also found limited quantities of glass, lithics and metal. At a depth of 10-15cm we encountered a thick layer of roof tiles which seemed to represent an intact collapsed roof. Our field season ended shortly after the discovery of the roof collapse, so we lined the units with plastic and backfilled.

Finally, we positioned a large excavation unit (A) directly in front of the *calpanería* to explore the use of outdoor space (see [Figure 8](#)). The 10m x 10m unit was placed in front of rooms 10-12. We were only able to begin the excavation of Unit A during the initial season, taking the soil down to a depth of 20cm across the unit. The artifacts from Unit A were much like those found in Room 21 and in the upper levels of the test units.

Preliminary Excavation Results—January-March 2007

In January 2007, Elizabeth Terese Newman (in consultation with Dr. Harold Juli) began eight weeks of excavations funded in part by the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. The excavations were designed to continue and expand upon the work begun in 2005. We began by re-opening the excavations in Unit A and Room 21. Following excavations in those areas, we expanded a midden area identified in test unit 5 during the 2005 season and excavated an additional four rooms in the *calpanería*. [Figure 8](#) shows all of the areas we excavated during the 2007 season in relation to the existing architecture of the *calpanería*.

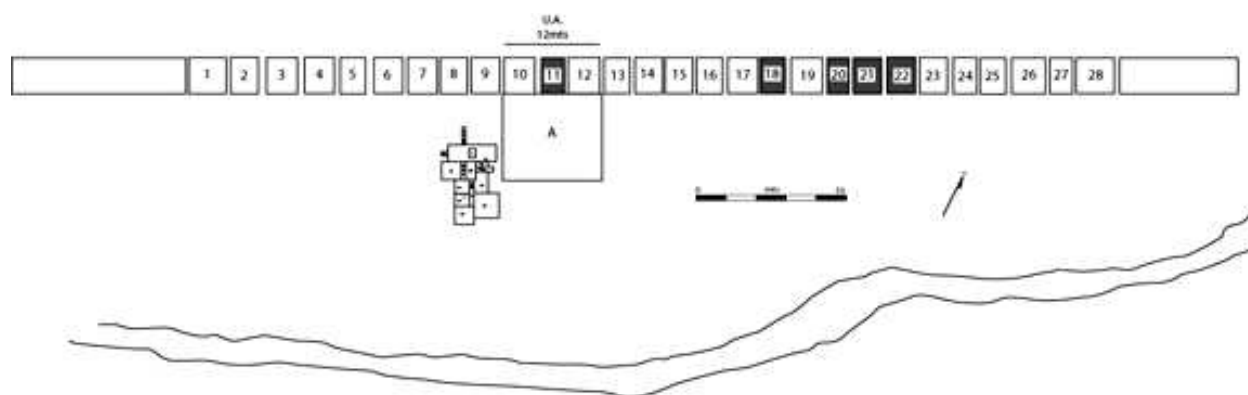


Figure 8. 2007 Excavation Units.

Unit A

In Unit A, we divided the 10 meter by 10 meter excavation area into quadrants and began excavating in the northwest and southeast. After excavating and screening the backfill from the 2005 season, we continued to excavate in 10 cm arbitrary levels. We encountered no discernable features in the southeast quadrant and quickly reached sterile soil (or *tepatate*) immediately below the plow zone at approximately 30 cm below our datum. To ensure that this was not a clean architectural fill, we excavated two randomly placed test holes to a depth of 120 cm below datum. When neither test hole produced artifacts or a change in stratigraphy, we closed the area and concentrated on the northwest quadrant.



Photograph 4. Unit A; Feature 1.

The northwest quadrant produced similar materials to those found in the southeast; however, at a depth of 70 cm below the datum, we found what appeared to be a feature ([Figure 9](#); [Photograph 4](#)) in the southwest corner of the quadrant. The feature consisted of a pile of rocks, approximately 90 cm in diameter (north to south), a few fragments of brick, a large fragment of a comal, a mano, and fragments of faunal remains. There was no burning in the area to indicate that the feature was a hearth, nor was the pile associated with any other remains to indicate architectural remains. After mapping and photographing the feature, we collected the artifacts and continued to excavate the entire unit. Thus far, we have been unable to discern a purpose for Feature 1, and it may simply be a concentration of trash and collapsed wall from the nearby *calpanería* that escaped dispersal from the plow. We continued to excavate the quadrant in 10 cm levels to the sterile soil encountered at a depth of 85 cm. Again, to ensure that we had indeed reached sterile soil, we excavated a test hole to 120 cm below datum. Again, we found no artifacts or change in stratigraphy, and chose to close Unit A without exploring the other two quadrants.

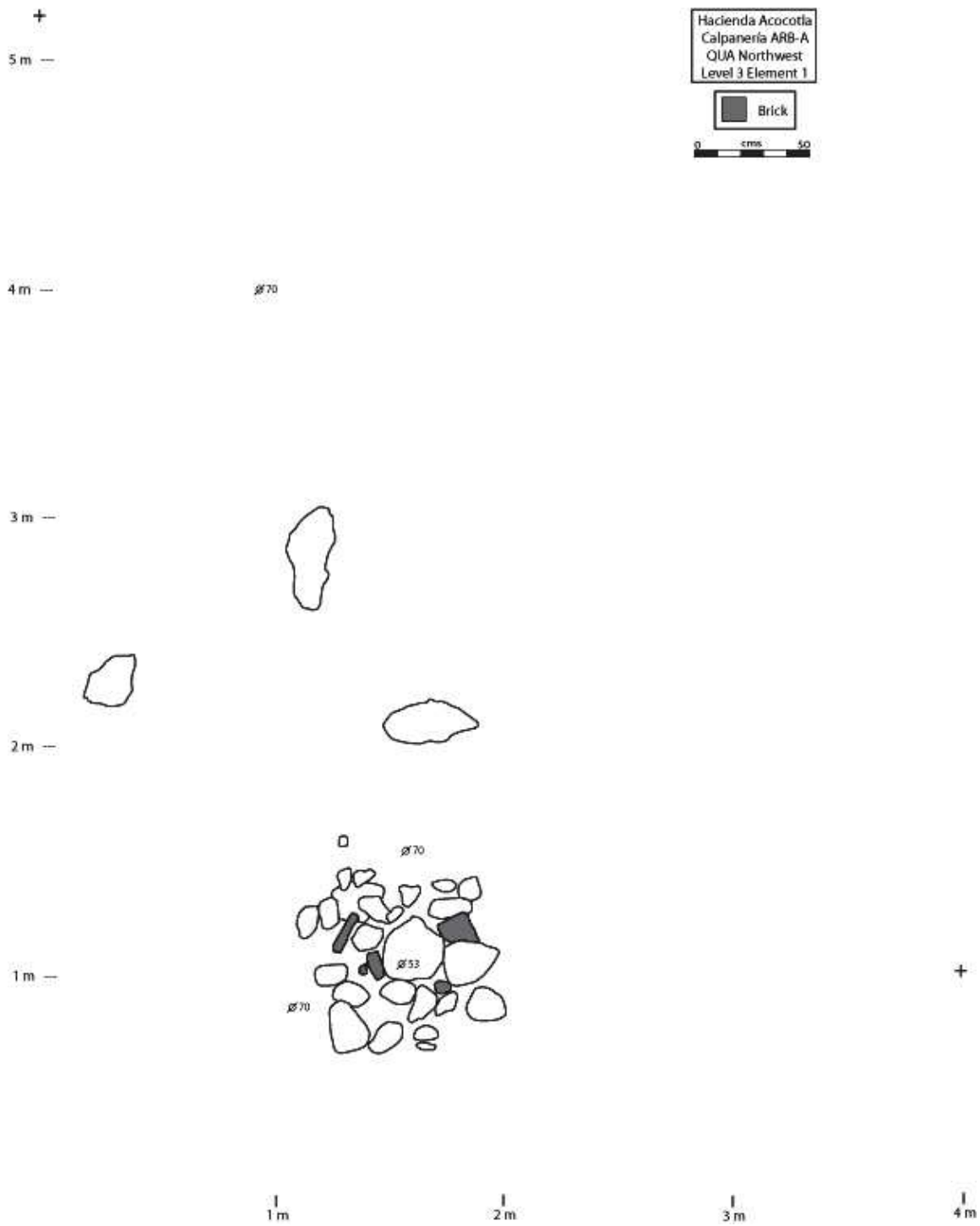
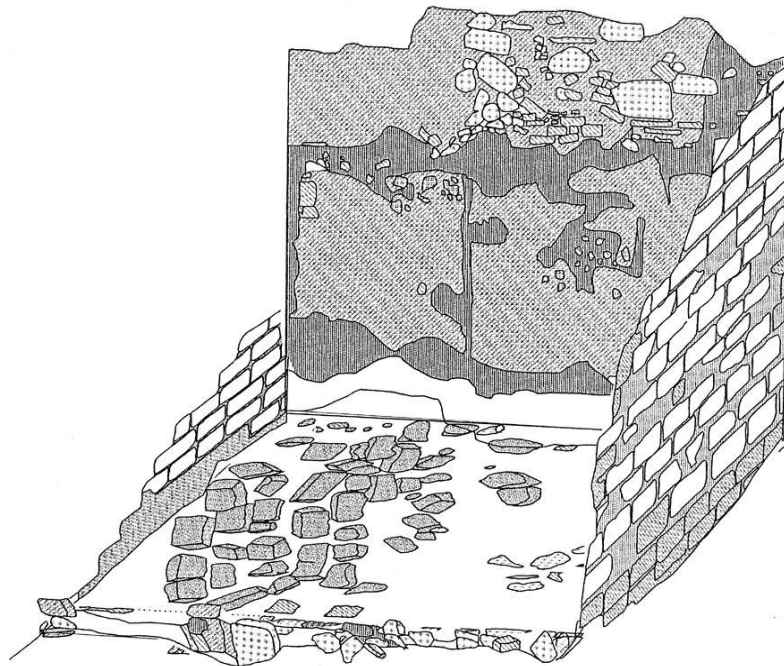


Figure 9. Unit A; Feature 1.

The Calpanería

While excavating Unit A, we simultaneously began excavations in Room 21 of the *calpanería*. Our excavations in this area proved extremely fruitful and indicated that the activity areas we expected to see in the field in front of the *calpanería* (such as in Unit A) were actually inside the rooms. As a result, we choose to re-focus our excavations on five of the rooms of the *calpanería* in varying states of preservation. Over the course of the eight weeks, we excavated rooms 11, 18, 20, 21, and 22 (see [Figure 8](#)). We excavated each room in quadrants to maintain horizontal control over recovered artifacts and in 10 cm arbitrary levels to maintain vertical control. With the exception of a few anomalies, each of the rooms presented remarkably similar features and stratigraphy. We will present the results from selected units here to provide a composite sketch of each room with exceptions discussed where appropriate. Unless otherwise noted, the following composite holds true to all of the excavated rooms.

While there are some slight size variations within the row of 37 structures, the units are remarkably similar. In 2005, we did a detailed architectural drawing of Room 13 (along with nine other rooms). This room provides us with a more completely preserved example of the less well-preserved examples we excavated in 2007. The basic construction material found in all the rooms is adobe bricks that were hand-made and thus lack size uniformity. Typical brick size is 40-60cm in length, 20cm wide and 20 cm in depth. The bricks were laid in a systematic pattern in rows ([Figure 10](#), [Figure 11](#), [Figure 12](#), [Figure 13](#), [Figure 14](#)). [Figure 11](#) shows that in the east wall profile of room #13 there is a regular pattern of adobe bricks covered with *repellado*. In general, the walls are in a poor state of preservation. Some adobes are very eroded, and others are intact. [Figure 12](#) shows the north wall profile where it is evident that along with adobes and *repellado* covering, there is also irregular use of stone, perhaps placed in various locations to either replace or save adobe bricks. This pattern is seen in all the *calpanería* rooms. In Room 13, the west wall was highly eroded ([Figure 10](#)), as was the entrance wall on the south side ([Figure 13](#)). The location of the door is towards the middle of the south wall. [Figure 14](#) is a plan map of the room's interior surface showing a scatter of adobe bricks and brick fragments, stone, *tabique*, some broken roof tiles and concrete fragments. *Tabique* bricks were produced in a specialized furnace at Acocotla and used in room construction.



Calpaneria 13

Figure 10. Reconstruction of Room 13.

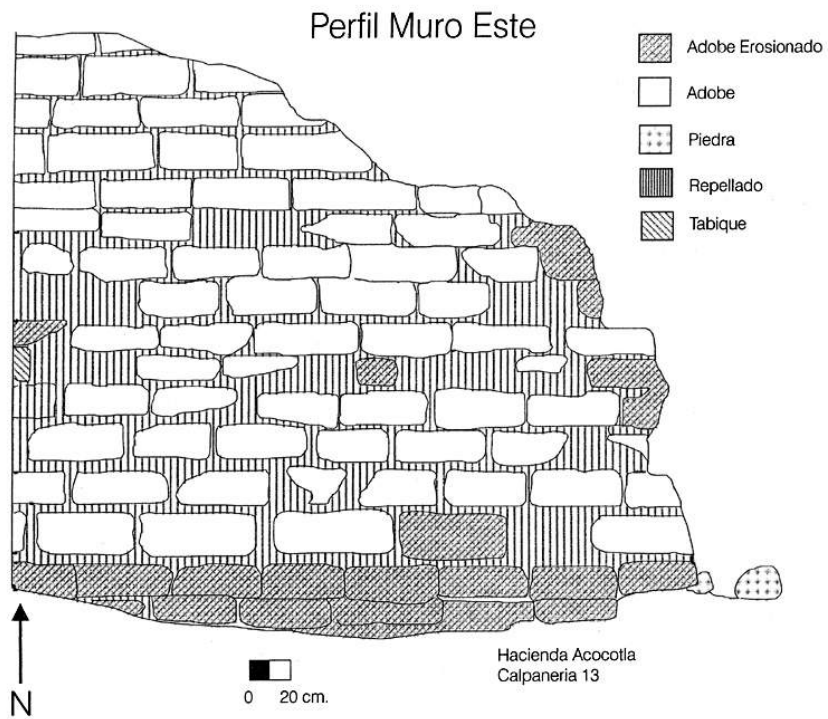


Figure 11. Room 13; East Wall.

Perfil Muro Norte

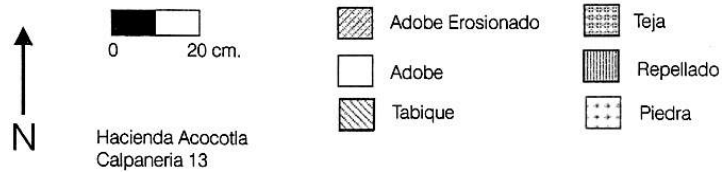
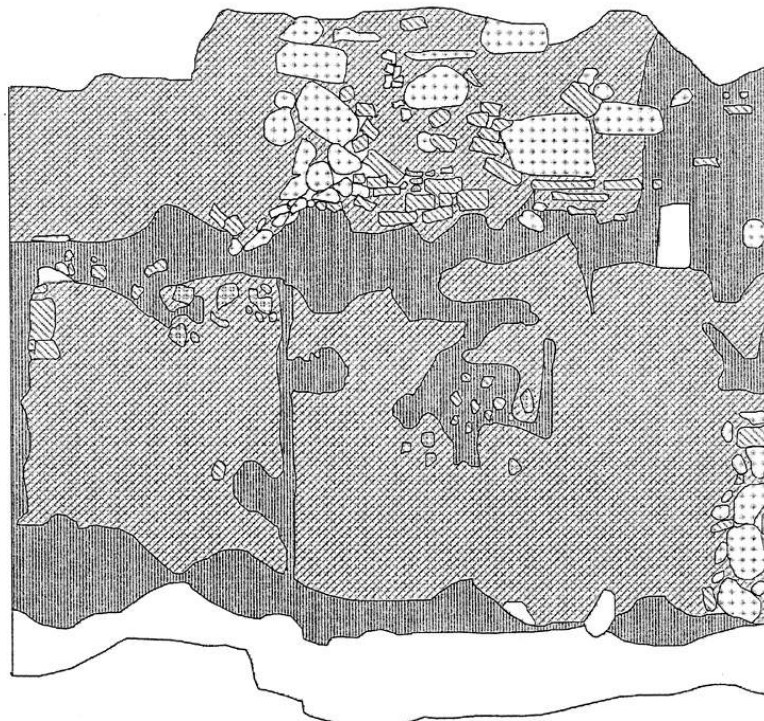


Figure 12. Room 13; North Wall.

Perfil Muro Sur

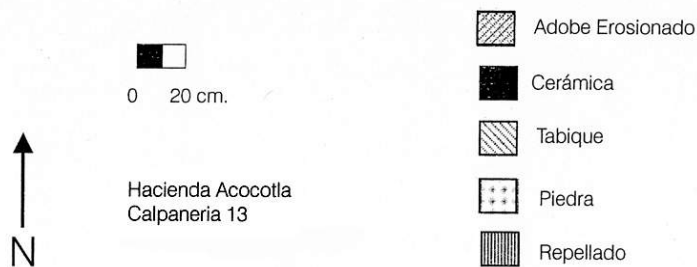
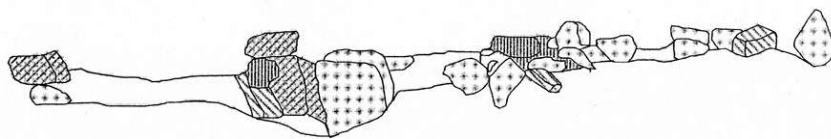


Figure 13. Room 13; South Wall.



Figure 14. Room 13; Plan Map.

Excavations during the 2007 season modified our understanding of the architecture very slightly. In each excavated room, we found a large threshold stone marking the entrance to the room very close to the southwest corner of the room (as seen in [Figure 15](#)). All other architectural details described above were found to be accurate. As mentioned above in the summary of our 2005 excavations, we found an intact, collapsed roof in each of the rooms ([Photograph 5](#)) (with the exception of Room 22, which had no roof fall present). The depth of this roof fall ranged from 10 cm to as much as 45 cm depending on the amount of collapsed wall that had accumulated on top of the roof; however, all were at approximately the same level in relation to the field in front of the rooms and the architectural threshold identified during excavations. We believe that this indicates a relatively contemporary collapse of all of the rooms, with the possible exception of Room 22, as well as a contemporary date for the abandonment of this section of the *calpanería*.¹

¹ Oral histories collected in the village of La Soledad Morelos during other phases of the project indicate that the section of the *calpanería* to the east of the main entrance was occupied by families as late as the 1960s. This did not seem to be true of the western section where we were conducting excavations.

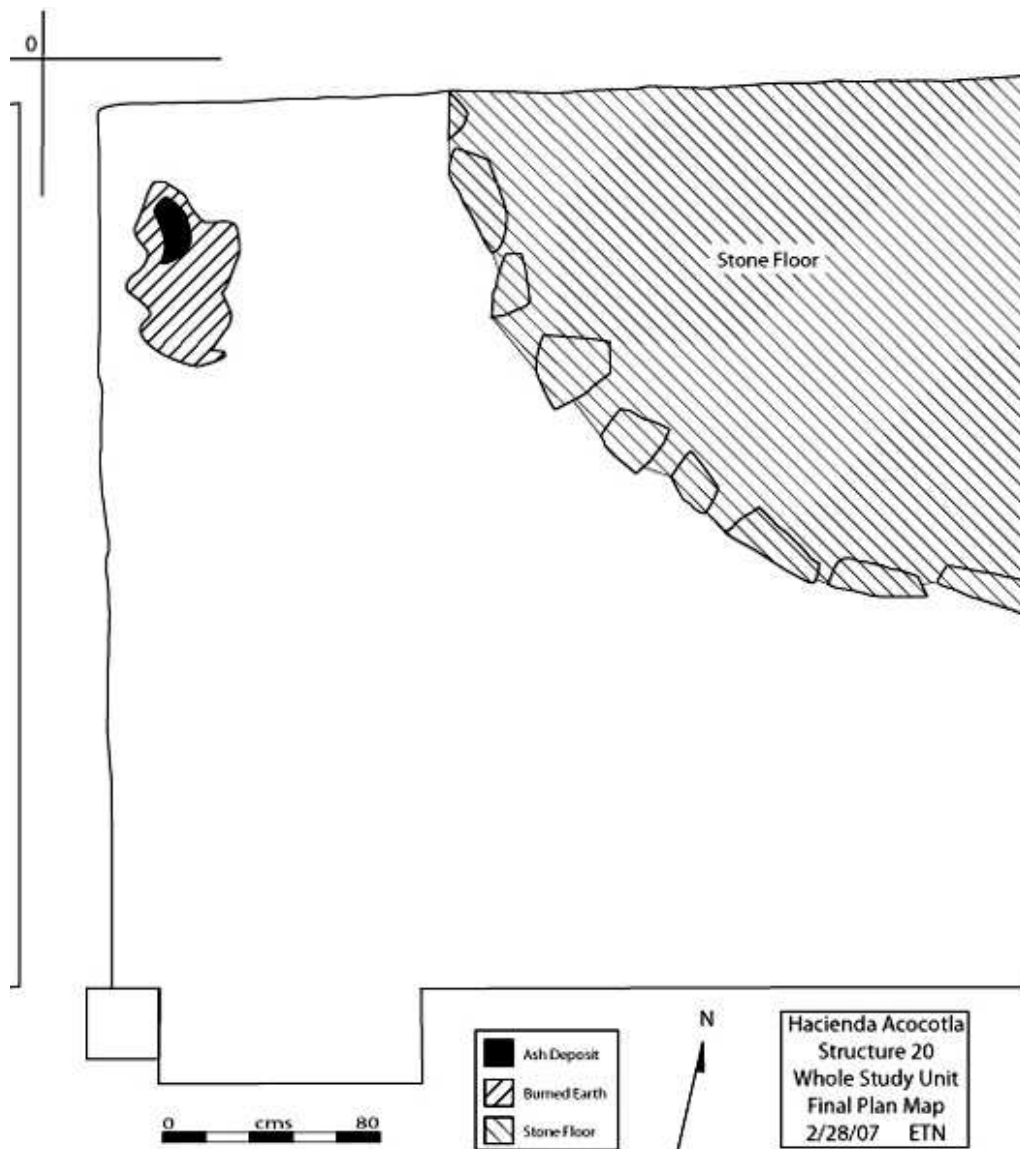


Figure 15. Room 20; Plan Map.

In rooms 20, 21 and 22, we encountered a compacted earth floor immediately below the roof collapse. In each of these rooms, we found a hearth in the northwest corner (for example, see [Figure 15](#)). The hearths were simple. In each case, a shallow hole had been dug in the floor in which a fire had been lit. The only variation to this pattern was found in Room 21. There, in addition to the shallow hole dug for the fire, there was also a small, deep hole filled with ash ([Figure 16](#)). Ostensibly, this was for cleaning the hearth. In addition, in the middle of the hearth in Room 21, we found the broken neck of a ceramic jar. We interpret this as a support for a cooking pot, indicating that the fires inside the rooms of the *calpanería* had a purpose beyond simply warming the space.



Photograph 5. Room 21; Roof Collapse and prepared floor underneath.

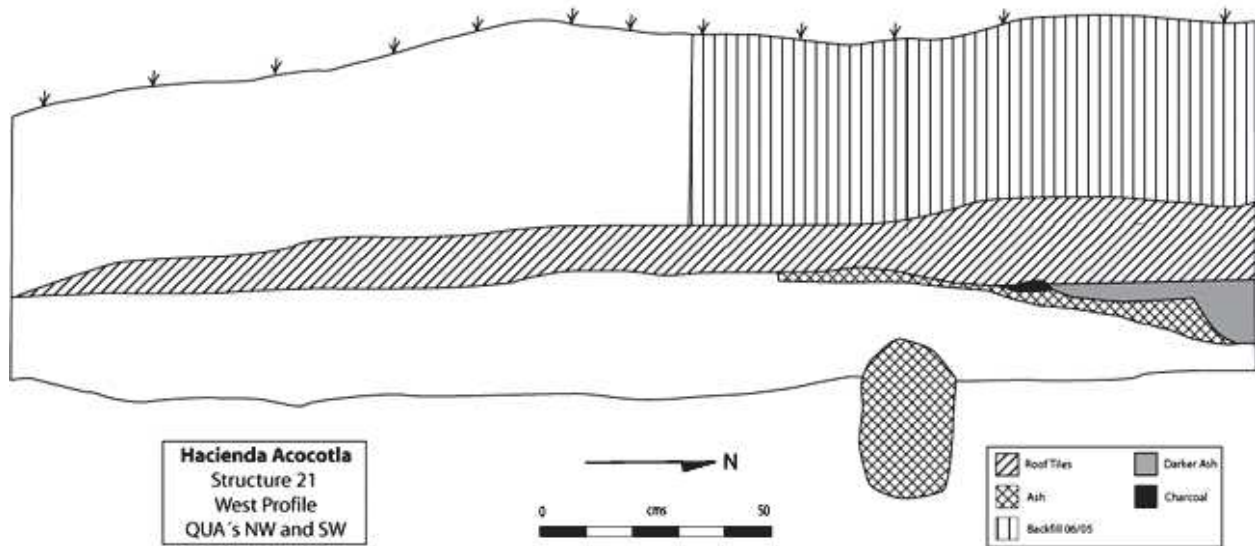


Figure 16. Room 21; West Wall Profile.

We continued excavating below the compacted earth floor and found a dense fill of mixed artifacts. Approximately 90 cm below datum in each of these three rooms (20, 21 and 22), we found a second compacted floor surface. There was no hearth or other features at this level, though artifacts, including glazed and unglazed redwares, mayolica, lithics, glass and metals were found in dense concentrations. At this level, in

the southeast quadrant of Room 21, we found a chert core, flake, and scraper made of the same material. The accompanying artifacts initially date to the late 18th and early 19th century, indicating that stone working continued among the workers on the Hacienda to a very late date. The presence of knapped bottle glass in multiple excavation contexts further supports this supposition. Below this floor, we encountered sterile soil. After ensuring that there were no further occupations below a clean architectural fill, we closed excavations in each of these units. The profiles of each of these rooms contained brick walls between the first and second floors, indicating that there may have been an earlier, smaller row of rooms fronting the Hacienda constructed out of brick rather than adobe.

Room 20 presented an architectural anomaly that remains as yet unidentified. While excavating the northeast quadrant, we encountered a rough cobble floor sitting directly on top of the roof fall ([Figure 15](#); [Photograph 6](#)). The floor was bounded along a circular edge to the west and south by faced stones. The north and east faces of the floor met the adobe walls of Room 20 and were approximately 180 cm on each side. This floor appears to have been built shortly after the roof of the room collapsed, though we cannot say for what purpose at this time.



Photograph 6. Room 20; Stone Floor.

Rooms 11 and 18 presented a slightly different profile. In these two rooms, we encountered a badly preserved plaster floor directly below the roof fall ([Photograph 7](#)). Neither of these rooms showed any evidence of a hearth. We continued excavations below the plaster floor and quickly reached sterile soil. Evidently, these two rooms had only a single occupation period in each, unlike the three rooms discussed above. Further, below the level of the plaster roof, the profiles of the excavation units showed no evidence of any construction. The adobe walls described in the first part of this section had been built directly onto natural deposits.



Photograph 7. Room 18; Plaster Floor.

We believe this supports the idea that there had been an expansion and reconstruction of an earlier *calpanería*. As discussed above, documentary sources mention the construction of a *calpanería* in 1850. Likely, rooms 11 and 18 were part of this construction phase. Rooms 20, 21 and 22 had an earlier occupation and, in 1850, were part of a remodeling of the entire area fronting the hacienda. At this time, they would have had their floors raised to the level of the other rooms that were being constructed. This line of reasoning will be further tested with the artifact analysis.

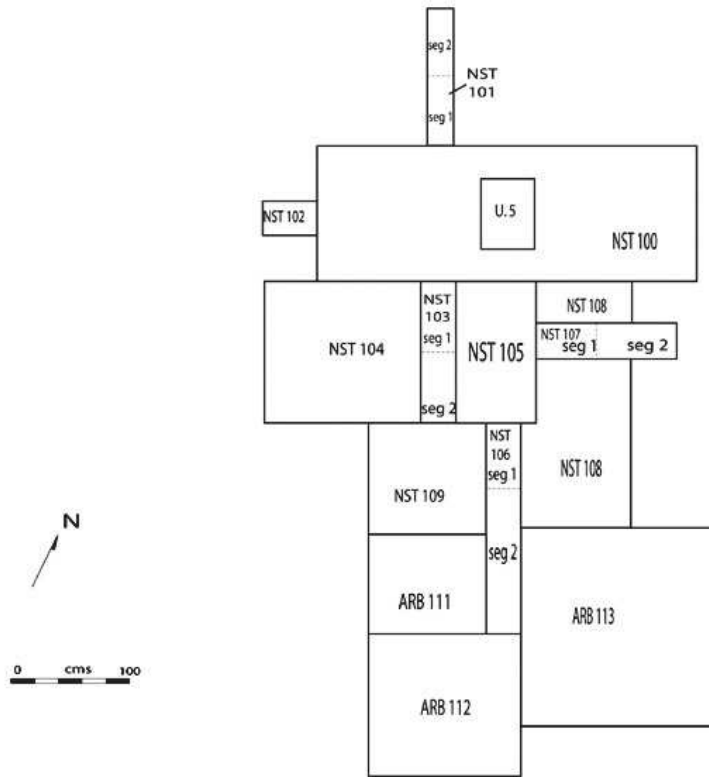


Figure 17. Midden Excavations.

The Midden

During preliminary excavations in the summer of 2005, we identified what we believed was a trash pit or midden area in test unit 5 (Figure 17). One of our excavation priorities during the 2007 season was to expand excavations in this area to test the extent of the midden and to expand our sample of faunal remains. With the intention of excavating a complete profile of the midden, we placed a large excavation unit (2 meters along the north/south axis and 7 meters to the east/west) centered on the original 1 meter by 1 meter test unit excavated in 2005. This entire area was excavated to a depth of 90 cm below datum, where we encountered sterile soil. The midden appears to be stratified and seems to date to the second half of the 19th century. Two one centavo coins were found in the midden, one in the upper levels dating in 1906 and another 60 cm below datum dating to 1864, supporting our initial dates.

Upon completing excavations of this unit, it became clear that we had found only a single edge of the midden on the eastern side of the excavations. To explore the extent of the deposit, we extended trenches in 1 meter by 50 centimeter sections from the north, west, and south walls. [Figure 17](#) shows the extent of the final excavations with each individual excavation unit numbered sequentially, as well as the relationship of the excavations of the standing hacienda architecture. We identified the edge of the midden approximately 2 meters to the north and 1 meter to the west of our original excavations (with non-structure 101 and 102); however, after extending the southern trench (non-structure 103) two meters, we encountered what appeared to be a collapsed structure 80 cm below datum at the end of the second section of the trench.



Photograph 8. Midden Unit; Plaster Floor and Rubble Collapse.

In order to identify the structure, we opened additional large, judgmentally placed units (non-structures 104 and 105 on [Figure 17](#)). We identified what did indeed appear to be a collapsed cobble wall on top of a plaster floor ([Photograph 8](#)). We were able to identify only the northern and western edges of the structure which, to the west, were bounded by extremely large boulders that were un-faced and likely a natural feature when the structure was built. To assist in determining the extent of the structure, we extended two more trenches (non-structures 106 and 107) to the east and south of the floor.

We found the eastern edge of the wall collapse and plaster floor in the first segment of non-structure 107. In non-structure 106, however, the wall and plaster continued until the end of section 2 of the trench, where we found indications of a brick floor or patio surface under the edge of the plaster. We spent the remaining weeks of the field season excavating this patio in an attempt to determine the purpose of the structure, as well as its date and associations with the current standing architecture of the hacienda. Ultimately, we determined that the brick floor was a carefully laid, square floor of brick measuring approximately 3.5 meters on each side ([Photograph 9](#)). The floor, as well as the collapsed cobbles and plaster, appears to be set directly onto sterile soil. Test holes excavated to a depth of an additional 100 cm support this conclusion.



Photograph 9. Midden Unit; Brick Patio/Floor.

As yet, the purpose and date of this structure remain undetermined. We are uncertain whether the brick structure was an indoor floor or an outside patio. The preservation state of the bricks would seem to indicate that it had been covered, however the associated architectural remains of the cobbles and the plaster floor argue otherwise. The extensive and dense midden above the structure appears to be a primary and either rapid or protected deposit. Preliminary analysis of the faunal remains show little weathering damage to the bones, arguing that the majority of bones found in the midden were exposed to the elements for fewer than three years (following standards set by Behrensmeyer (1978)) and likely represent a primary deposit. The large size of ceramic sherds in the midden, as well as the ease with which many of the vessel fragments mend further support the idea that the midden represents a primary and rapid deposit. We expect the complete artifact analysis will help us in a final interpretation of the structure and associated midden.

Conclusions and Ongoing Research Goals

Using the research described above, we were able to recover several major data sets relating to colonial and 19th century indigenous life at the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla. These materials consist of a historic ceramic assemblage reflecting vessel forms, decorative styles and functions related to various subsistence and socio-cultural activities. Beyond this, we were able to collect extensive quantities of faunal and floral remains, and non-ceramic artifacts including metals, glass and lithic items. In addition, we were able to recover information about the architectural history of the Hacienda. Instead of the ephemeral remains of impermanent architecture we expected to find associated with the hacienda, we discovered that the buildings adjacent to and/or preceding the standing remains of the *calpanería* were much more substantial than either documentary or oral historical evidence had led us to believe. Further, and again in contradiction to the oral historical and documentary evidence, we found that most important domestic activity areas seemed to be inside the small rooms of the *calpanería*, rather than in the adjacent field. As we continue to analyze this data, we expect to find patterns in artifactual, faunal, spatial, and architectural information that will help describe material correlates of indigenous worker lifeways. These analyses will be complimented by our ongoing ethnoarchaeological, ethnohistoric, and ethnographic research among both *mestizo* and indigenous descendent communities.

Much recent work in historical archaeology has sought to define the material contributions and correlates of ethnic identity among peoples of post-contact periods (Jones 1997, McGuire and Paynter 1991b, Singleton 1995). Our work at the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla engages with this body of research by combining documentary, ethnographic and archaeological research to study colonial and republican era indigenous patterns. The archaeological perspective offers a baseline of information to understand both the material and socio-cultural changes and processes that 16th to 19th century rural workers experienced as they followed pathways leading to current ideas about community, self and the past. Ethnographic, ethnoarchaeological and historical research among the descendant communities provide us with information about how and why these pathways diverged, resulting, today, in different cultural identities, languages and both daily and ritual practices.

Archaeologists working on related contexts have suggested models of these changes focusing on acculturation (Wheaton and Garrion 1985), creolization (Ferguson 1992), and domination/resistance (McKee 1992, Meyers and Carlson 2002). These processes are still being debated as explanations for the emergence of modern identities among formerly indigenous, enslaved and rural people in a variety of social contexts (Baumann 2004). Our work at the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla is making an ongoing contribution to this debate from the perspective of the Mexican Hacienda and has the potential to augment our understanding of the processes that helped to form contemporary identity among one segment of rural Mexican society.

Acknowledgements

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