In the Shadow of Popocatepetl: Archaeological Survey and Mapping at Tlaxcala, México

Research Year: 2006
Culture: Nahua
Chronology: Late Postclassic
Location: Central Plateau, México
Site: Tlaxcala

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Abstract

The following report describes the results of a FAMSI-funded archaeological survey in Tlaxcala, México during the 2006-2007 season. Tlaxcala is located in the heart of central México and was the capital of a late pre-Hispanic (1150–1521 C.E.) confederacy that controlled much of the area within the modern state of Tlaxcala. New archaeological data, collected by this project, indicate that its capital covered a coterminous area greater than seven square kilometers and was spread across a series of hilltops and the intervening valley. It was a decentralized and multi-centric city with numerous barrios. Intensive archaeological mapping focused on the architectural core of the Tepeticpac barrio. The project uncovered a unique architecture style, unknown in the rest of central México. Low, broad platforms and numerous expansive plazas dominate this new style, instead of tall and narrow pyramids common at other sites (e.g., Tenochtitlán and Cholula). The architectural patterns also indicate materialization of dual political structures described in the ethnohistoric literature on Tlaxcala and the Nahuatl. The results of this project have important implications for our understanding of pre-Hispanic political-economic structures and the history of an important but poorly studied pre-Conquest state.

Resumen

El siguiente informe describe los resultados obtenidos durante el proyecto de prospección arqueológica en Tlaxcala, llevado a cabo con el apoyo de fondos FAMSI durante la temporada de 2006-2007. Tlaxcala está localizado en el corazón del México central y fue la capital de la confederación pre-hispánica tardía (1150–1521 d.C.) la cual poseía el control de la mayoría del área del estado moderno de Tlaxcala. Los nuevos datos arqueológicos, recolectado en este proyecto, indican que su capital cubría una área de más que siete kilómetros cuadrados localizada dentro de un valle y extendida a través de una serie de cerros. Era una ciudad descentralizada y multi-céntrica que poseía numerosos barrios. La prospección intensiva realizada fue enfocada en el centro arquitectónico del barrio Tepeticpac. En el proyecto se identificó un estilo arquitectónico único, desconocido hasta ahora en el México central. Plataformas bajas y largas y grandes y numerosas plazas determinan este nuevo estilo, a diferencia de pirámides altas y angostas comúnmente presentes en otras zonas (*v.g.* Tenochtitlán y Cholula). El patrón arquitectónico indica la presencia de estructuras políticas duales descritas en la literatura etnohistorica de Tlaxcala y los Náhuatles. Los resultados de este proyecto tienen importantes implicaciones sobre nuestro entendimiento y conocimiento de las estructuras político-económicas pre-hispánicas y sobre la historia de un importantísimo y poco estudiado estado de la época de la pre-conquista.

Submitted 03/22/2007 by:
Dr. Lane F. Fargher, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Purdue University
Stone Hall
700 West State Street
West Lafayette, IN 47907
lfargher@purdue.edu

Background

The following report describes the results of the first phase of archaeological survey at Tlaxcala (aboriginally Taxcalla or Texcalla)[1] conducted during the 2006-2007 season. This site was the capital of a Late Postclassic (1150–1521 C.E.) confederacy that extended over a large part of the modern state of Tlaxcala (see Merino Carrión and García Cook 1998 for the limits of the pre-Hispanic state) (Figure 1). It is located along side of and partially under the current state capital, Tlaxcala, in the heart of Central México. Ethnically, Otomí, Nahua, and Pinomes populated the city and state during the Late Postclassic (Gibson 1952). Early Colonial population estimates are lacking for the city, but Cortés' account can be taken to indicate a population between 100,000 and 150,000. The entire confederacy had a population between 200,000 and 500,000 at the time of conquest (Gibson 1952). However, Merino Carrión and García Cook (1998:96-97) estimate a population of about 160,000 based on regional archaeological survey. Documents also indicate a well-developed corporate/collective political-economic structure (discussed below).

Methodology

The methodology applied in this phase of the project involved a combination of reconnaissance and intensive survey. During the reconnaissance phase, the site was casually walked and architectural and artifact distributions were noted. During the intensive survey phase, a crew systematically walked a portion of the site and located, measured, and mapped architectural features on a topographic map set over an airphoto. Features were located and measured using a combination of GPS, compass/clinometer, and tapes. A total station was not available for this phase of the project. The second phase of the project will include total station mapping. During the course of locating and measuring architectural features, artifact types and locations were noted.

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[1] The ancient name of Tlaxcala, Taxcalla will be used here to distinguish the pre-Hispanic city from the modern city (Muñoz Camargo 1986:36; Nava Rodríguez 1966:16).

Results

The initial phase of fieldwork at Taxcalla has been highly successful on a number of levels. In the following discussion, I illustrate the results. After acquiring permits at the federal and local levels, the project began with an initial reconnaissance and intensive surveying in the barrio of Tepeticpac. This section of the archaeological site is the best preserved and least damaged by contemporary urbanization of the four barrios traditionally recognized in the ethnohistoric literature (e.g., Gibson 1952; Lockhart 1992). However, the use of this traditional schema is problematic because it obscures finer distinctions in the urban settlement pattern and has lead some scholars to claim that the Taxcalla was in fact not a city but four separate and discrete settlements (Lockhart 1992). However, archaeological data and oral histories, as well as the historic record, indicate there were more than four barrios. For example, Muñoz Camargo (1999) describes a fifth barrio, Teotlapan, and contemporary Tepeticpaños report that it consisted of 14 barrios based on oral history. New archaeological data collected by this project supports this more complex picture of Taxcalla.

Reconnaissance

The area between modern Tepeticpac and Cerro Cuautzi, at the edge of the modern urbanized zone, shows extensive pre-Hispanic occupation (Figure 1). Artifact scatters, including Late Postclassic polychromes, brown-ware body sherds, a dog figurine, and obsidian blades and a projectile point, all indicate that the "valley" between Ocotelulco, Tepeticpac, and Tizatlan was a residential zone. This area corresponds with Muñoz Camargo's (1999) description of Teotlapan's location. Furthermore, surface remains in empty lots, near the edge of the urbanized area, indicate that Taxcalla extends under the northern limit of Tlaxcala. These basic surface data are incredibly important because they link the four "separate" hilltop zones into a single coterminous urban settlement that covered at least seven square kilometers. The area occupied by ancient Teotlapan[2] is heavily terraced and parceled into private plots. Postclassic ceramics eroding out at the edges of some of these terraces suggest that they have been maintained since the pre-Hispanic era. However, these observations must be tested with intensive survey. (I chose to wait to survey these areas because gaining permission for individual private plots will be time consuming and difficult. I instead focused intensive survey on the better-preserved and communally held area of Cerros El Fuerte, Tlaxicoatl, and Cuautzi.)

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[2] The modern barrio called La Candelaria Teotlapan has been displaced from this its original location by settlement pattern changes during the Colonial and Republic Periods.
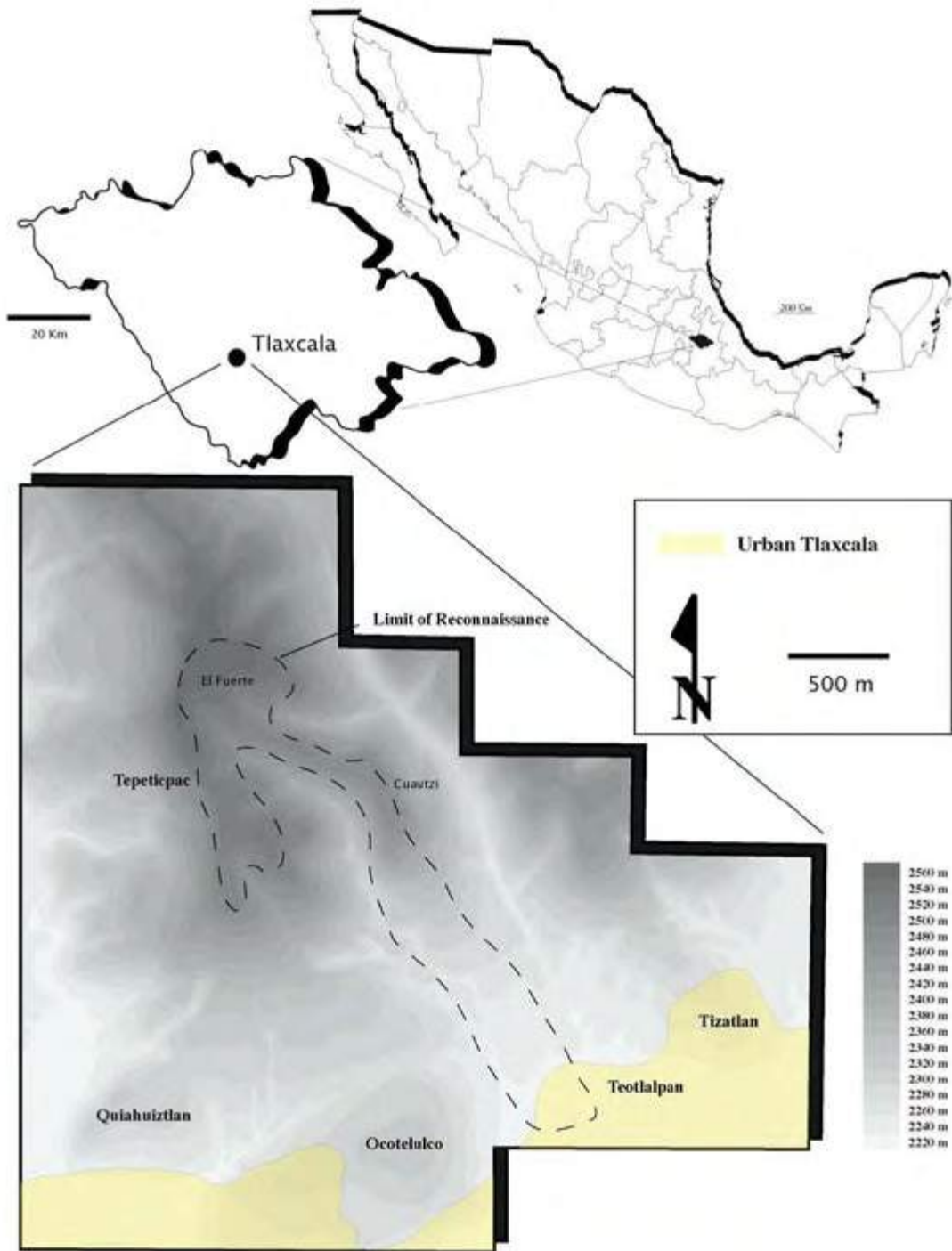
Figure 1. Location of Study Area.

From ancient Teotlapan there are two roads that provided communication between this barrio and the hilltop areas of El Fuerte and Cuautzi. These roads were paved with stone and measured two to three meters in width when they were in use (Figure 2 and Figure 3). The road that runs along the southwest side of the Cerro Cuautzi passes

through a gateway and then widens in several places along the route providing possible points for traffic moving in opposite directions to pass, or possible rest/way-stations along the steep climb (Figure 4). At the hilltop the road passes through a gateway before entering the civic-ceremonial core of the Tepeticpac barrio. The other road winds up the front face of Cerro Cuautzi passing between large and substantial domestic terraces and then passes just below an impressive defensive wall that measures 1.5 meters in width, before arriving at the hilltop (Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Figure 2. SW Road.

Figure 3. East Road to Cuautzi.

Figure 4. SW Road Lower Gateway.

Figure 5. Terrace Wall on Lower Face of Cuautzi.

Top of Wall

Figure 6. Defensive Wall.

On the hilltop a series of four massive interconnected platform-plaza areas were constructed to level the hilltop of Cerro Cuautzi and create a huge architectural complex. The first plaza, located northwest and downhill from the defensive wall, is framed on the northeast and southwest sides by stone retaining walls and measures about 40-50 meters in width. At the northwest end, a low northeast-southwest running

wall divides it from the second plaza in the series. The second plaza has low mounds that appear to be the ruins of a large structure or complex of structures. At the northwest end of the plaza, a couple of adjacent rooms are partially intact (Figure 7). These rooms have three walls each, with their southwest wall missing. A long northwest-southeast running wall, that covers almost the length of the plaza, forms the northeast wall for each room. Located adjacent to the second plaza on its northwest side is a third plaza. This next plaza is higher in elevation and as a result has three retaining walls, on the northeast, southeast, and southwest sides. The north corner is framed by a vertical retaining wall that is at least five meters tall. Here a small looter's pit near the center of the plaza reveals a partially preserved wall of another structure (Figure 8). On the northwest end, a low dividing wall separates it from the fourth plaza (Figure 9). The fourth plaza has been partially excavated by INAH, which uncovered and consolidated a small single-room temple (Figure 10). A second severely-looted mound lies northwest of the excavated structure (Figure 11). At the northwest end of this plaza, the hill turns more westerly and descends into a saddle. The descent has been modified architecturally by a series of platforms that appears to be an attempt to make the entire hill of Cerro Cuautzi into a massive stepped structure.
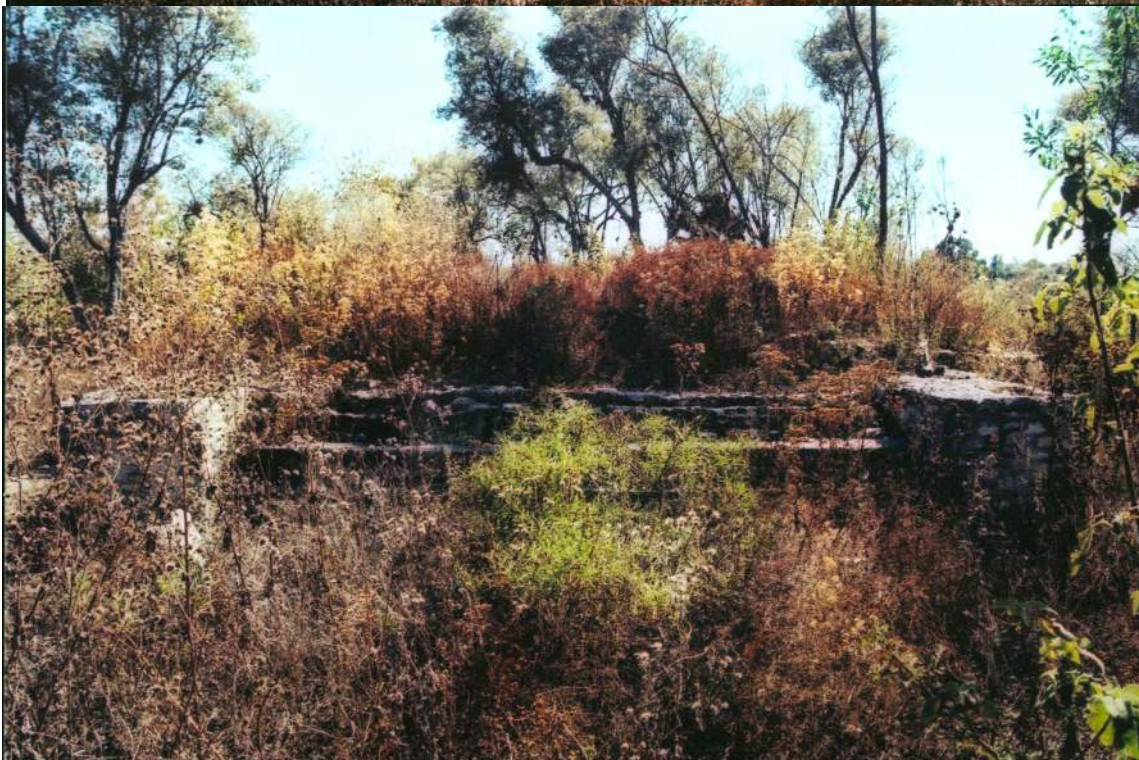

Figure 7. Standing Structure Walls on Cerro Cuautzi.

Figure 8. Looter's Pit Exposing Wall Fragment.

Figure 9. Low Dividing Wall Between Plazas on Cerro Cuautzi.

Figure 10. Temple Excavated by INAH.

The saddle that connects Cerro Cuautzi with Cerro El Fuerte to the northwest has been artificially leveled and covered in a string of plazas and platforms. The hill rising from the saddle to Cerro El Fuerte has also been modified by a series of platforms and terraces. Thus, the two hills and the intervening saddle have been incorporated into a nearly continuous architectural complex measuring about 800 meters in length. I estimate based on the survey that it encloses about 30,000-40,000 square meters (excluding platforms 4, 5, 6, and 9). Given the scale of this complex, I was only able to map part of it.

Figure 11. Looter's Pit in Mound near INAH Excavation.

Intensive Survey and Mapping

Survey and mapping began with the plaza complex on the top of Cerro el Fuerte (Plaza 1) and continued across the saddle to the base of Cerro Cuautzi. In this area, I mapped five plazas and nine platforms, as well as 23 terraces and five road segments ([Figure 12](#)). On an adjacent hill, I mapped an additional plaza complex with one platform. The area under discussion includes additional terraces that have not yet been mapped. Part of the intensive survey was devoted to developing a methodology for distinguishing between modern and ancient terraces[3]. Some *campesinos* are currently cultivating areas of the site and actively constructing new terraces, while at the same time plowing ancient ones ([Figure 13](#)). Thus separating modern from old is a major issue for operationalizing the survey. Now that the methodology has been established additional terraces can be mapped. The methodology will be necessary for demonstrating to local officials, INAH, and other professional archaeologists that some terraces currently in use are ancient domestic structures and should be mapped and protected.

Plaza 1 is a large architectural unit framed by a front retention wall measuring about 192 m in length ([Figure 14](#) and [Figure 15](#)). The wall has two tiers, which is typical of Taxcallan architecture (another example being the consolidated wall at Tizatlan). The wall originally stood about two meters, each tier measuring one meter, and was faced with cut stone and plastered (preserved plaster is still visible in places). The plaza has three potential entrances, a 3-meter wide *entrada* that ramps up through the front wall, a gateway at the back of the plaza, measuring about seven meters in width, and another probably gateway at the west end of the plaza that has been destroyed by recent road construction. It varies from 110–75 m deep with two mounds constructed on top of it. The first mound (Platform 1) is a large ballcourt measuring about 92 m by 58 m (bottom area) ([Figure 16](#)). Facing it is a smaller mound (Platform 2) about 50 cm in elevations with three small rooms and a Colonial church ([Figure 17](#) and [Figure 18](#)). The rooms are arranged in a highly symmetrical fashion, however one was truncated by the construction of the church ([Figure 19](#)). Construction of the church probably destroyed additional structures given its location near the center of the mound. Importantly, the placement of the church on this plaza indicates that it was an easily accessible location for a large swath of the population during the pre-Hispanic Era.

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[3] Ancient and modern terraces are distinguishable based on materials used in terrace wall construction, shape of the terrace and retaining wall, and overall in-filling strategy. These criteria were verified by intensive examination of "ancient" terraces currently under cultivated. These terraces were covered with high densities of domestic pottery, building rubble, and ash-rich soils. Such patterns are typical of residential terraces excavated elsewhere in highland Mesoamerica, e.g., El Palmillo, Oaxaca.
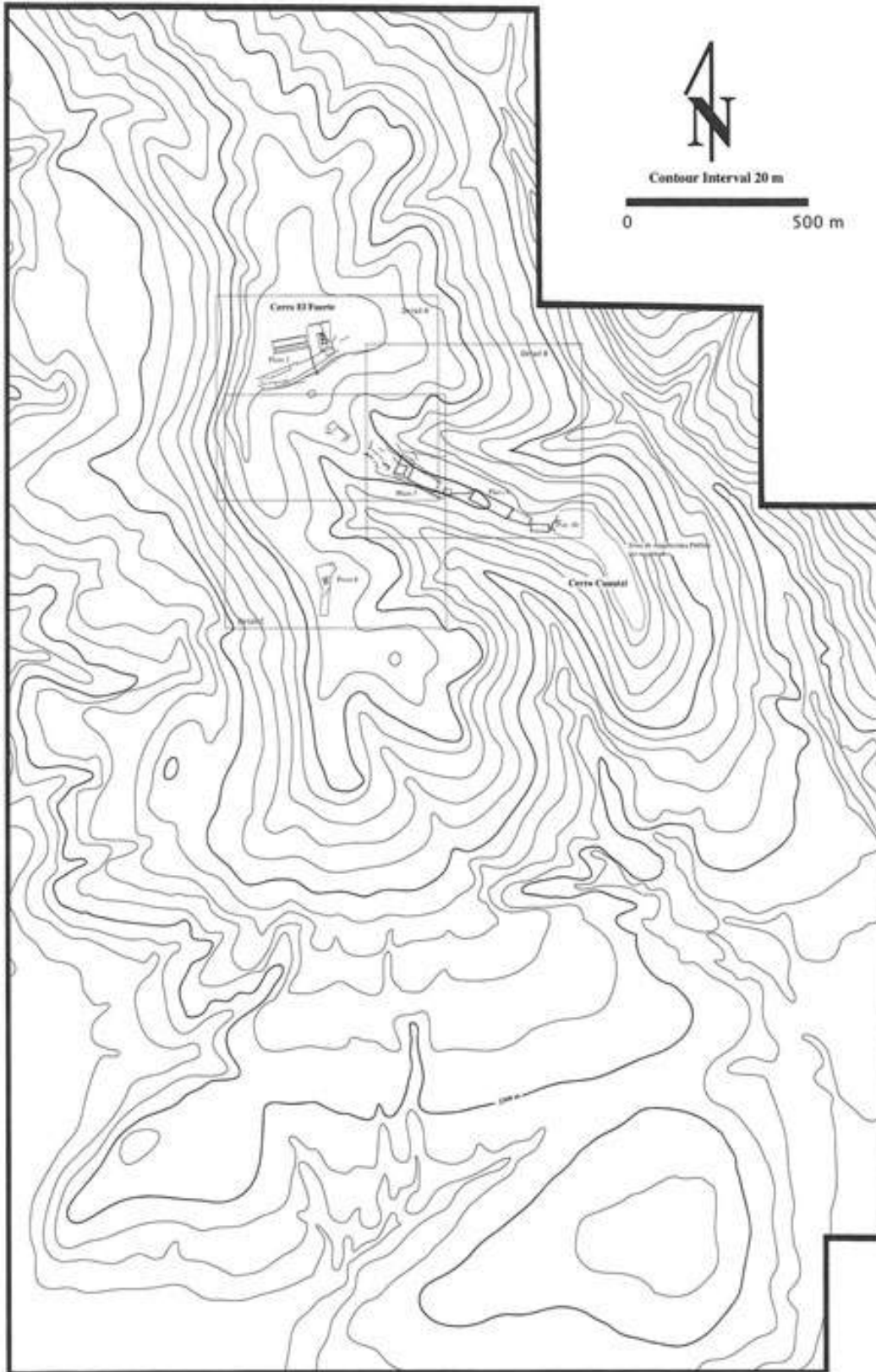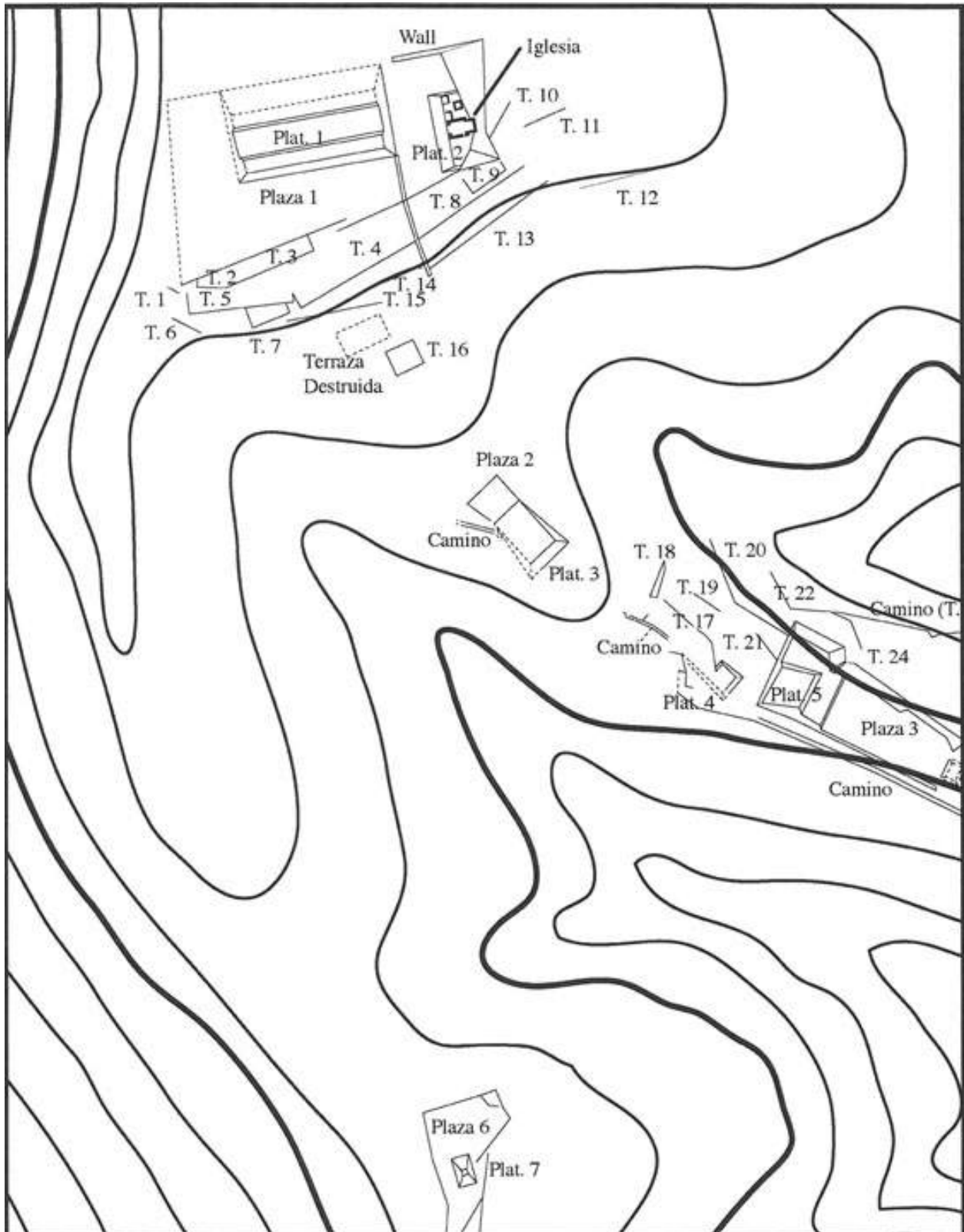
Figure 12. Archaeological Map of Tepeticpac.

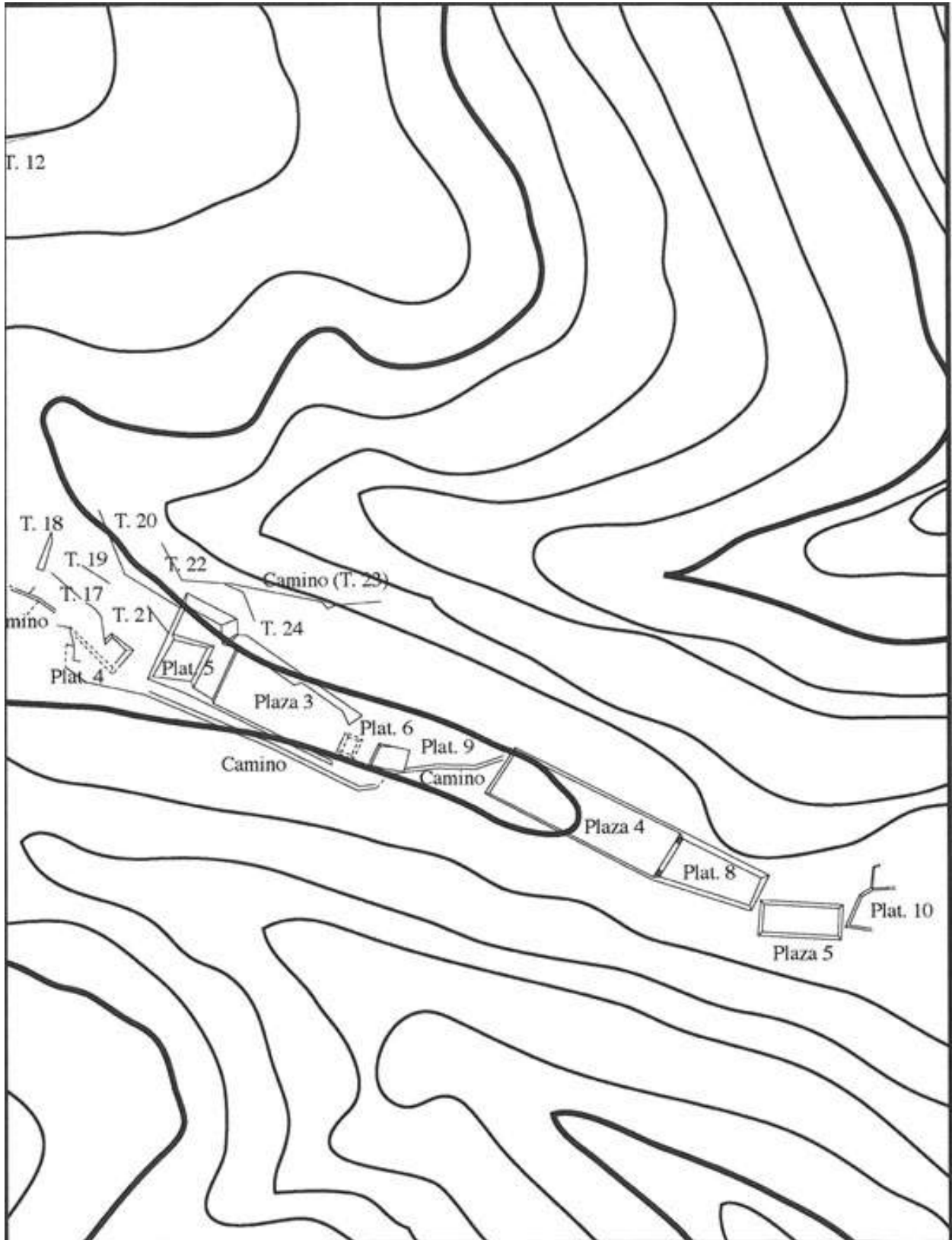**Figure 12a. Detail A (Scale 1:3024).**

Figure 12b. Detail B (Scale 1:3024).

Figure 12c. Detail C (Scale 1:3024).

Figure 13. Remains of House Destroyed by Modern Plowing.

Looking West

Looking NNW

Looking North

Figure 14. Plaza 1.

Figure 15. Plaza 1 South Retaining Wall (Rubble Core Exposed).

Looking East

Looking East

Looking West

Figure 16. Platform 1 (Ballcourt).

South Façade

Entrance (West Façade)

East Façade

Figure 17. Early Colonial Church.

Structure 3

Structure 4

Structure 5

**Figure 18. Structure Walls on Platform 2.**

Figure 19. Structure 4 Wall Truncated by Church.

Below the plaza, a series of terraces step down to the saddle. Within the terraces is an additional *entrada*, that ramps up to terrace 8, and a series of walls that run perpendicular to the terraces. It appears that the *entradas* and walls were constructed to force people climbing to the plaza to snake back and forth through a series of gates and

at the same time expose them to the architectural grandeur of the plaza's monumental wall and ballcourt before arriving in the central area.

Continuing down the hill, one encounters the second plaza complex with a small plaza (Plaza 2), measuring 25.8 m x 18 m and a small platform (Platform 3), measuring 18 m x 29.7 m (top area). Erosion along the sides of the mound reveals a cut stone facing and plastered surface (Figure 20). However, it is not clear if an enclosed structure was constructed on top of this platform from surface indications. Further down hill, another small platform was constructed (Platform 4). This platform has been severally damaged by recent road construction and may have measured 35 m x 13.1 m (top area).
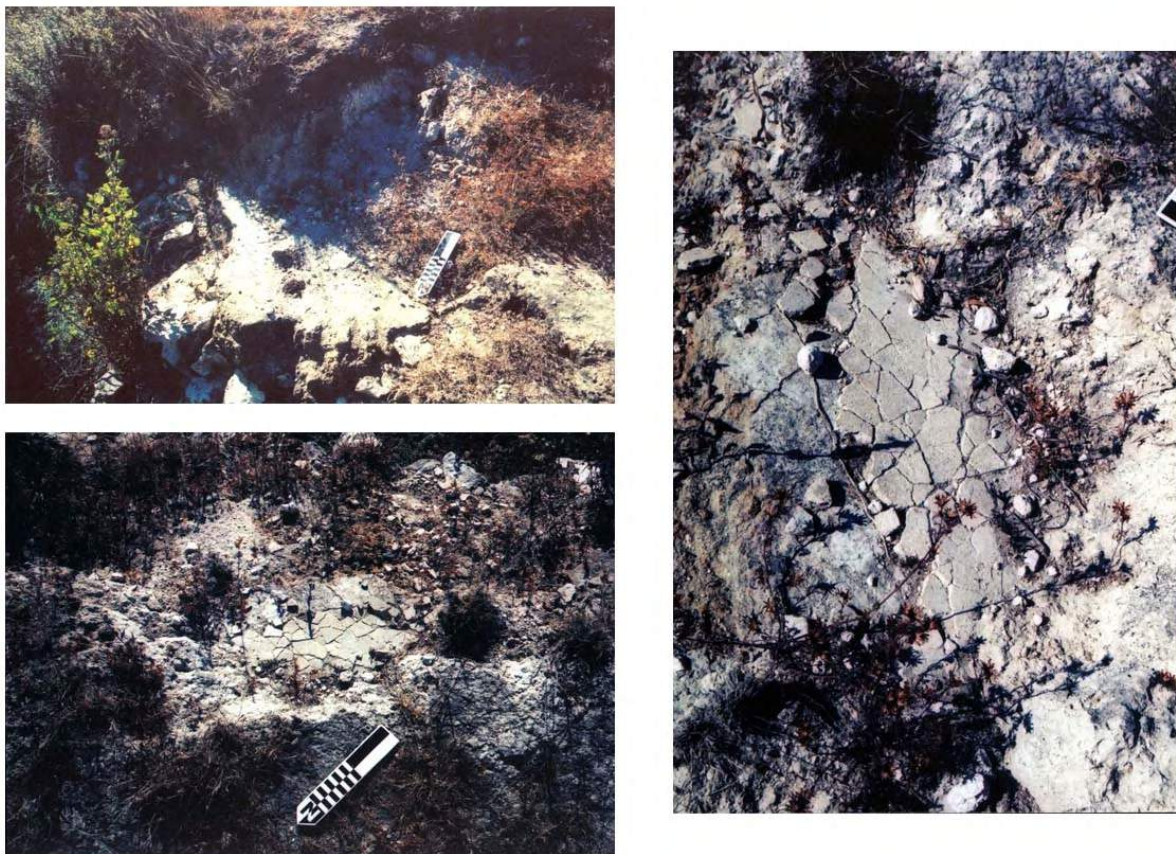
Figure 20. Platform 3 Stucco Floor.

Descending onto the saddle, one encounters a third Plaza complex (Plaza 3) (Figure 21), which consists of a two-tier mound (Platform 5, upper tier top area 535.5 sq. m, lower tier top area 418 sq. m) and a double mound complex (Platforms 6 [63 sq. m top area] and 9 [66 sq. m top area]), arranged linearly, located at the ends of the long, narrow plaza (Figure 22). The plaza is well-defined by two retaining walls running along its northeast and southwest sides. This plaza covers about 2,720 sq. m. Beyond this

complex, is a series of plazas and a mound (Plazas 4 [3517 sq. m] and 5 [800 sq. m], and Platform 8 [1390.5 sq. m top area]) that lead to the base of Cerro Cuautzi and the platforms that climb it (Platform 10) (Figure 23 and Figure 24). Here vegetation is quite heavy and line of site is quite limited making mapping very difficult.

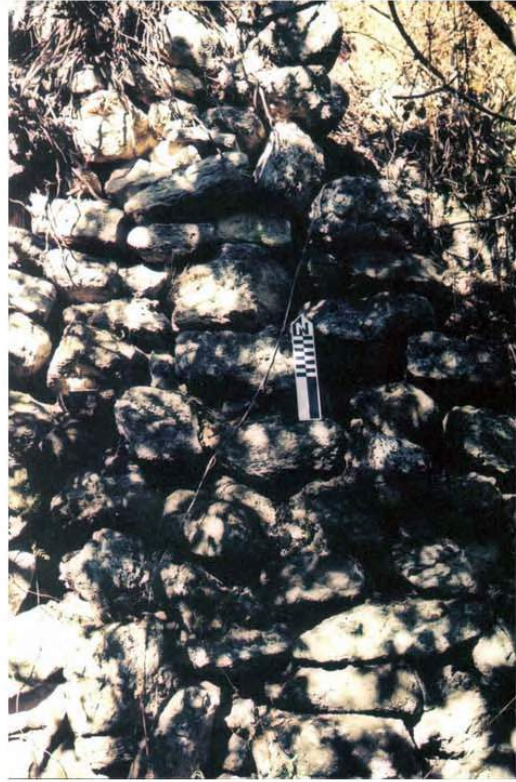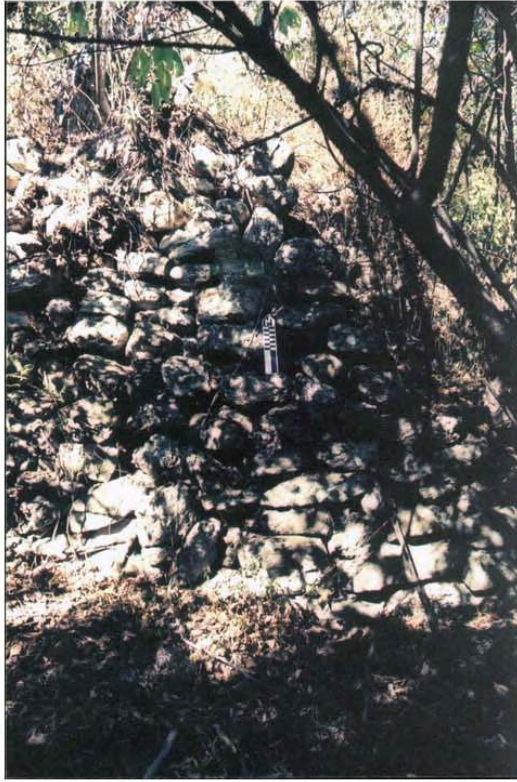**Figure 21. Looking South from Plaza 1 to Plaza 3.**

Looking SE

SW Corner of
Retaining Wall

Figure 22. Platform 5.

East Retaining Wall (Rubble Core and Facing Stones)

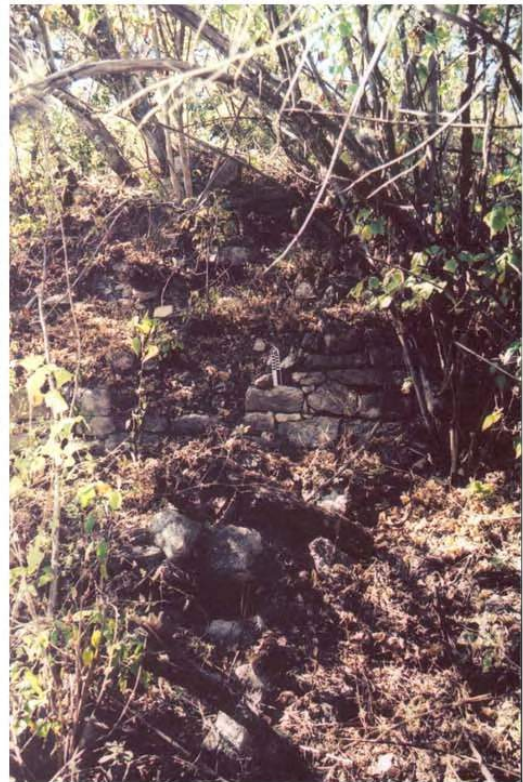North Retaining Wall (Façade Partially Intact)

Figure 23. Platform 8.

Figure 24. Platform 10 West Retaining Wall (Facing Stone).

Architecture

The Taxcallan architectural style, exemplified by Tepeticpac, Ocotelulco, and Tizatlan, differs significantly from other sites in Central México (Cholula, Teotihuacán, and Tenochtitlán). This difference may have contributed to an overall lack of interest by previous generations of archaeologists in Taxcalla. The perceived normative pattern, by archaeologists, for public architecture is one dominated by high, mounded architecture or pyramids (e.g., Pyramids of the Sun and Moon, Templo Mayor, and Great Pyramid of Cholula). However, archaeological data indicates that Taxcalla departs dramatically from the "norm"[4]. Instead, it focused public construction on low, broad plazas and platforms with small structures on top of them (Figure 25 and Figure 26). This pattern seems to be focused on providing wide access to public architecture, instead of limiting it with high exclusive pyramids. Preliminary survey data indicate that these areas were well serviced by roads and wide gateways that would have facilitated the movement of large numbers of people into and out of these spaces.

The other striking architectural feature, at least as expressed at Tepeticpac, is a strong pattern of duality. At a large scale, the public architecture involves two hills opposed across a saddle, creating a metaphoric plaza with pyramids at each end. There also seems to be differentiation in architecture at each end of this metaphoric plaza. The Cerro El Fuerte end has a large ballcourt (military orientation) and the Cerro Cuautzi end has an apparent complex of rooms or courts (administrative offices). At a smaller scale, Plaza 1 has a dual structure with two juxtaposed mounds. Plaza 3 has a two-tiered mound at one and a dual mound at the other end creating a strong overall sense of duality. The plaza area excavated by INAH again has two juxtaposed mounds.

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[4] The perceived "shortcomings" of a Tlaxcala without pyramids is so acute that contemporary Tlaxcalans claim that there are actually pyramids, but whenever they are excavated they are mysteriously covered again with soil so you can't see them.

Figure 25. Central Plaza at Ocotelulco.

Finally, at the site scale, a strong multi-centric urban pattern is emerging, which incorporates large public spaces at Tepeticpac, Ocotelulco, and Tizatlan. At each of the barrio cores, public architecture seems to have that indelible Taxcallan character dominated by large open plazas and low platforms with small structures. One of the goals proposed at the outset of this project was to determine if Taxcalla has a multi-centric social structure. Survey data from Tepeticpac confirms that this pattern was well-developed. If the ethnohistoric descriptions for the growth of Taxcalla (e.g., Muñoz Camargo 1986) are accurate, then these architectural patterns reflect the complex development of a strongly collective state.

Figure 26. Temple Complex, Tizatlan.

Artifacts

Briefly, artifacts so far identified during survey can be divided into three categories: ceramics, obsidian, and groundstone. Late Postclassic ceramics are widely distributed across the site area examined ([Figure 27](#)). Other ceramic phases were not identified during the survey, which indicates that the site was not occupied during previous periods (e.g., Classic and Early Postclassic Periods). Among the single component ceramics are a large number of polychrome sherds. These sherds are spread across the entire site and appear in both public and domestic contexts. Currently, survey data suggest that access to polychromes was shared across social sectors and not monopolized by a social, economic, political elite. However, there may be a higher density of polychromes in the large plaza areas, which would indicate intensive consumption of these vessels during large public rituals that incorporated the majority of the city's or barrio's population. Ceramic data also indicates at least two ceramic workshops. One on or near Terrace 13 was identifiable based on a mold, a kinwaster, kin furniture, fired clay hunks, and odd support forms. It also contained a spindle whorl and primary obsidian reduction flakes. The second was located in the vicinity of Terrace 24, where I noted another mold and fired clay lumps. High densities of strap-handle jars were noted along roadways and throughout the site. Such specialized handles, used to tie lids on vessels or to carry vessels, could be taken as evidence of intensive trade and marketing activities at the site. Groove-hook rims, a Terminal Postclassic (1450–1620 C.E.) form used to hold lids and common in heavily commercialized areas of Mesoamerica (Kepecs 1994), are also present on the site reinforcing the interpretation of heavy trade. Another important ceramic type, Poblano Glaze Ware (McCafferty 2001), is present indicating that the occupation in at least one section of Tepeticpac extended into the Colonial Era.

Both blades and debitage were among the obsidian artifacts examine during the survey. Debitage included both primary and secondary reduction flakes. My field assistant also informed me that his brother had collected a large prismatic blade core, which is now currently held by the Tepeticpac village museum. Together these data indicate that specialized obsidian blade production occurred at the site and may have been an important economic activity. The obsidian observed on the surface of the site included clear (Pico de Orizaba), green (Pachuca), and black (Otumba?), indicating that Taxcalla was well connected with the Postclassic macro-regional marketing system (e.g., Blanton *et al.* 2005; Smith and Berdan 2003). Furthermore, the presence of Pachuca and possible Otumba obsidians indicate that despite military-political tensions with the Aztec, the flow of obsidian from the latter was not impeded. However the flow of these goods may have been cut off during the final years of the pre-Hispanic era and this would not be apparent based on survey data (e.g., Gibson 1952).
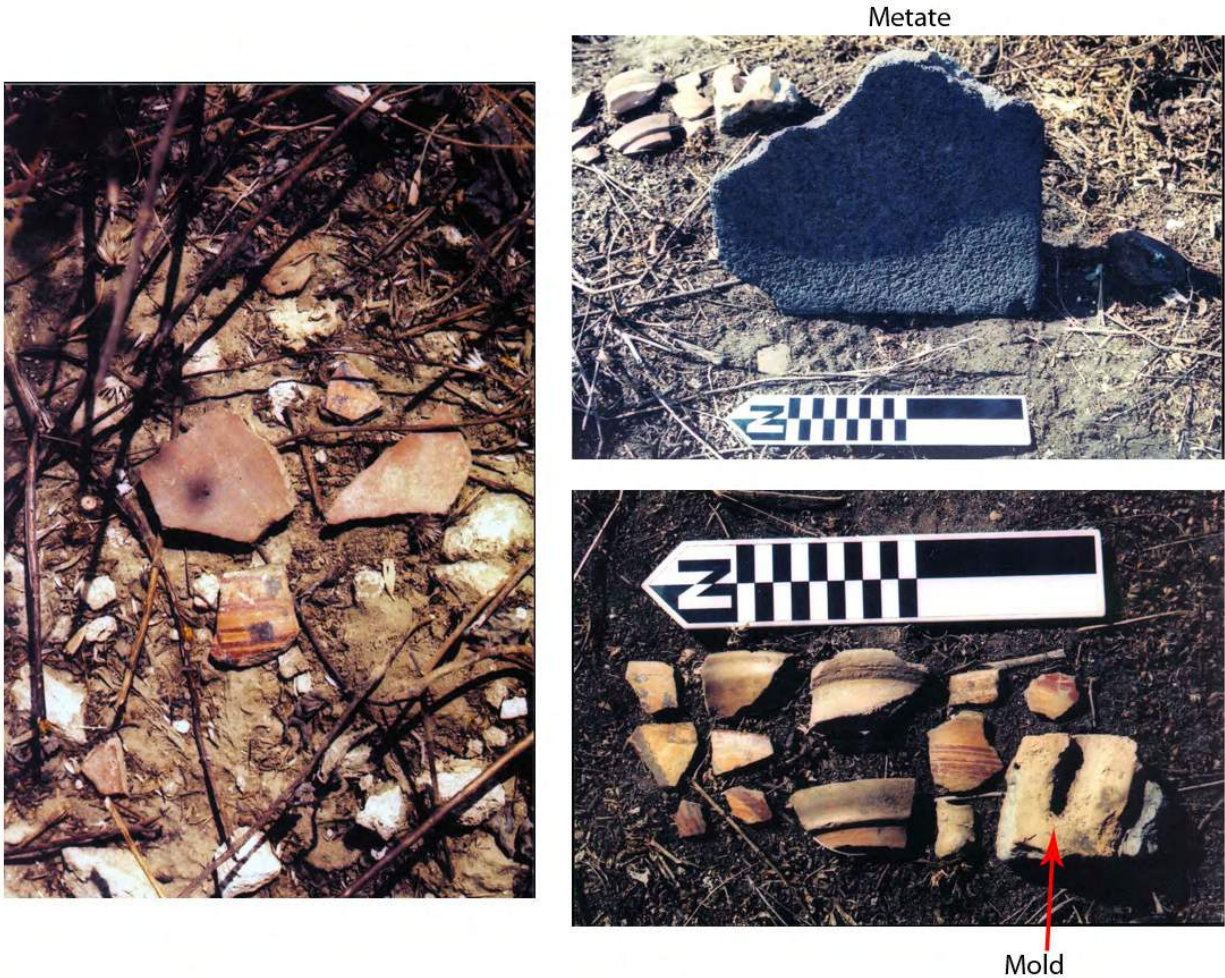
Figure 27. Surface Artifacts (Ceramics and Groundstone).

Finally, I identified a number of *manos* and *metates* during the survey. *Metates* were either slab or tripod. Their presence indicates that the hilltop area of Tepeticpac had a residential occupation and was not strictly a civic-ceremonial zone. At least some of these were made from basalt, which was not available locally and, thus, had to be imported. Data are currently insufficient to determine if the basalt artifacts were imported as finished goods or as raw materials that were worked into finished goods locally.

Discussion

It is my contention that architectural patterns dovetail nicely with the image of Taxcallan political structure that emerges from a careful reading of the ethnohistoric literature, without adding an unnecessary Marxist distortion (e.g., Carrasco 1966, 1976). Descriptions of Taxcallan and Nahua political organization from Muñoz Camargo (1986), Durán (1971), and Zorita (1994) indicate that it was somewhat bureaucratized,

positions were achieved not inherited, and political officials were recruited from across social sectors and not just from the aristocracy (see also Anguiano and Chapa 1976; Davies 1987; Gibson 1952; Lockhart 1992; Offner 1983; van Zantwijk 1985). Importantly, the aristocracy (social "elite") did not have a monopoly on political offices and were not guaranteed political positions. The highest-level offices, associated with specific titles, administrative territories, and administrative structures (e.g., *tecpans* and *teccalli*), were strictly appointed based on merit and not inherited and were temporary. Positions were salaried using appanages and political positions did not bring fiefs. Such an organizational structure is constructed by governing agents that are attempting to build more collective political entities able to respond to constituent (peasant) voice (Blanton and Fargher n.d.a., Blanton and Fargher n.d.b; Fargher and Blanton *in press*).

The documents also indicate there was a strong dual division between legislative and executive (Cortés 1986; Díaz del Castillo 1927; Gibson 1952; Lockhart 1992; Sempat Assadourian and Martínez 1991). In the Taxcallan case, legislative decisions were made by consensus among a relatively large number of political officials and aristocracy. This consul involved possible as many as 50-200 members during the pre-Hispanic Era, however the documents are unclear as to the exact number. Gibson (1952) reports that with only slight Spanish meddling, this consul numbered about 220 electors during the early Colonial Period. It made decisions that affected the entire province of Taxcalla on matters of war and diplomacy, and the appointment of *tlatoque* from among the eligible candidates based on heredity.

The day-to-day administration and carrying out special decisions made by the consul were left to the executive side of the government. Here we see a strong duality in the political structure between an administrative-judiciary branch (internal) and a military branch (external) (Aguilera 1991; Cortés 1986; Díaz del Castillo 1927; Gibson 1952; Lockhart 1992; Nava Rodríquez 1966; Sempat Assadourian and Martínez 1991)[5]. According to contact era documents, the *tlatoani* of Ocotelulco was responsible for tax collection, corvée mobilization for civil projects, markets, and law and order. His *tecpan*, the central market, and the *calmecac* (the school which trained officials for administrative and judicial positions) were all located in Ocotelulco. He appears to have been assisted in his duties by the *tlatoani* of Tepeticpac.

In contrast, the *tlatoani* of Tizatlan was the head of the military and diplomacy branch of the government. He took the lead in directing military campaigns, recruiting military corvée, and meeting with or sending representatives to meet with foreign officials. His *tecpan* and the *telpochcalli* (military school which trained men for war) were located in Tizatlan. He was assisted in his duties by the *tlatoani* of Quiahuiztlan. (Although there was a clear rivalry between the two for control of this branch at the conquest.)

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[5] The quadripartite division of Tlaxcalan government established during the colonial period appears to have been a simplification of a more complex structure consisting of complementary and hierarchical sets of duality (c.f., Pohl 2003a and b). The highest level juxtaposed Ocotelulco-Tepeticpac (Internal, North-South Axis) against Tizatlan-Quiahuiztlan (External, East-West Axis) to form a dual structure. Unlike the Aztec, the internal end of moiety was higher ranked (c.f., van Zantwijk 1985). Below it, Ocotelulco was opposed to Tepeticpac forming another moiety and Tizatlan was opposed to Quiahuiztlan forming a third moiety.

According to the histories collected by Muñoz Camargo (1986; see also Gibson 1952), Tepeticpac was the oldest and first barrio founded in Taxcalla. If it were first, then the archaeology would indicate that the dual structure in the executive branch of the government was already established before the founding of Ocotelulco. Cerro El Fuerte, with Plaza 1 and the ballcourt (Platform 1), probably functioned as the military headquarters and housed the *telpochcalli*; whereas, Cerro Cuautzi housed the administrative-judicial apparatus and *calmecac*. The administrative-judicial officials may have been housed in the large multi-room structure or courts noted in this area. Such an application of the historic record to the archaeological data could explain the El Fuerte-Cuautzi dual structural pattern. If so, then at some point before the conquest, the administrative chief moved his headquarters to Ocotelulco or his position was usurped, and the military chief moved his headquarters to Tizatlan or his position was usurped.

Figure 28. Altar with Polychrome Mural, Tizatlan.

I originally hypothesized that such a strong collective pattern should be expressed in a collective or corporate architectural plan. The basic layout of this plan was determined based on intensive studies of other cities organized in similar ways (e.g. Teotihuacán

and Xochicalco). It includes a multi-centric urban pattern and large, open spaces for mass public ritual, but does not include exclusive palatial residences and large burial pyramids dedicated to powerful individuals located at the center the settlement. Initial survey data indicate that Taxcalla exudes a powerful corporate or collective ideology in its architecture, with its large, open plazas, broad, low platforms, and small structures. The scale of Tepeticpac's plaza space, 30,000-40,000 sq. m, suggests that mass participation in public rituals/activities was important and that a significant proportion of the city's early population could attend. These activities differed from such events in Classic Maya settlements that focused on rich and power individuals standing atop high pyramids and elevated causeways with limited access (e.g., Inomata 2006). The collective or shared political ideology was also manifested in its multi-centric organization that did not emphasize one barrio over any other.

The distribution of artifacts indicate that a socio-political "elite" living in the civic-ceremonial core of the site did not monopolize prestige goods (e.g., green obsidian and polychrome pottery), and instead these items were widely available as bulk-luxury goods (Blanton *et al.* 2005). Also, they did not construct elaborate personal burial monuments. Excavations in civic-ceremonial areas of Ocotelulco and Tizatlan, though limited, have failed to uncover fancy tombs. Instead they have exposed small temples with elaborate polychrome murals dedicated to religion and the gods, not individuals (Figure 26 and Figure 28).

Contributions

These data provide an excellent foundation for further archaeological research at Taxcalla. They establish this site as one of the largest and most important archaeological zones in Central México. They demonstrate that a large proportion of the site is currently preserved and relatively untouched by more recent urbanization. The extent and nature of public architecture is providing new and unexpected information on pre-Hispanic political organization. These data will help change the way we understand pre-Hispanic society and help break Anthropology and Mesoamerican studies out of our Marxist rut. They go a long way to support Cortés' initial observation that the city housed 100,000-150,000 people and help explain whey the Aztec were unable to conquer the Taxcallans despite repeated attempts.

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