Cihuatecpan: An Aztec Period Village in the Teotihuacan Valley

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This is a village study, a paleoethnographic account of a Late Postclassic Nahua culture community in the upper Teotihuacan Valley. Village studies offer invaluable insight into society as a whole by focusing on the productive mass of the population, but archaeology has traditionally ignored this perspective, instead investigating monuments of the elite.

Large-scale settlement studies such as the Teotihuacan Valley Project (Sanders, 1965) offer a holistic view of ancient societies. In directing this and other projects, William Sanders saw settlement survey not only as a first step in understanding the overall workings of any society, but also as a first stage in identifying appropriate sites for future, more intensive research. Furthermore, he followed Pedro Armillas' pioneering lead in stressing the critical importance of village studies and lamenting their neglect by archaeologists. Excavations at non-urban sites could test hypotheses generated by surveys and contribute new and detailed information on the life ways of the commoners, and on the labor and tribute resources haggled over by the lords.

Sanders taught the importance of these principles, and also marshaled his students into service in various campaigns of settlement pattern survey and rural site research. Sanders, Jeffrey Parsons, Mary Hrones Parsons, Thomas Charlton, Joseph Marino, Charles Fletcher, and others had surveyed virtually all of the Teotihuacan Valley in the mid-1960s (Sanders, 1965). As a graduate student in the mid-to-late 1970s, I did field surveying in the Teotihuacan Valley to learn about the distribution and extent of rural sites. Surveying with Sanders was archaeological education at its finest, learning to decipher the clues to the Aztec period landscape while he provided insights from ethnohistoric sources, ethnography, and other archaeological cultures. It was during this time that I developed the mental image of him as working on a vast intellectual jigsaw puzzle whose various pieces would together depict the course of cultural evolution in the Basin of Mexico. Sanders had learned about settlement surveys during his graduate career at Harvard, from Gordon Willey. Sanders taught these

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puzzle-solving strategies and tactics to dozens of archaeologists, and we have thus become team-mates in the effort to reconstruct culture history and processes.

In the 1960s and 1970s, one could walk for days over the Teotihuacan Valley's piedmont zone without leaving the maguey (Agave spp.) terraced clusters of *tlateles*, the remains of the houses occupied by families that flourished in the 15th and early 16th centuries (Figure 1). On the ground surface were scatters of artifacts — Black-on-Orange and other Aztec pottery, broken tools and obsidian debitage, ground stone tools, ceramic figurines and spindle whorls — all indicated a rich culture life, worth studying more closely.

The site selected for further study in 1984 was T.A. 81, known from the contact period as Cihuatecpan (Figure 2). It was chosen because it typified the dispersed type of terraced rural village so common in the Late Postclassic in this part of the Central Highlands; also, it had survived into the 1980s in a relatively intact state. Five km east of Otumba in the upper Teotihuacan Valley, Cihuatecpan was first mapped by the Teotihuacan Valley Project in 1964; the 1984 season of intensive field research was sponsored by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) and the National Science...
Foundation, and consisted of eight weeks of field operations (intensive survey and excavation, with a crew averaging 12 workers), followed by six weeks of artifact accessioning (with a crew averaging five workers). During this time, we excavated at 10 loci, uncovering the remains of eight buildings, a jagüey-type pond, and an obsidian dump (Evans and Abrams, 1988). We recovered nearly 100,000 sherds, hundreds of other artifacts (Evans, ed., 1988), and over half a ton of obsidian debitage (Abrams, 1988).

The considerable amount of structural excavation and artifact recovery during this short time, with a relatively small crew, indicates the salvage nature of our efforts. Cihuatecpan was not, itself, immediately threatened, but the amount of destruction of other Aztec sites in the Teotihuacan Valley was shocking (Parsons, 1989a). A site type once abundant had become an endangered species, and my modest village-study research project was nearly too late to secure a village to study.

Research goals were to provide evidence of the degree of sociocultural complexity, the level of affluence and nature of local production of food and goods, and expression of the belief system at the local level. Furthermore, such evidence would illuminate the role of the village in the larger cultural system of the Late Postclassic city-states and confederations. The following report draws from a decade of data analysis and interpretation, and describes the village's history and functions, as we know them from Cihuatecpan's remains.
Cihuatecpan: Setting and Culture History

The upper Teotihuacan Valley is cool and semi-arid, lacking permanent water sources. Its annual rainfall average is less than 500 mm³, barely enough to support unirrigated cultivation of grain crops, and insufficient for potable liquid needs of human settlers. Yet by the early 16th century the piedmont zone was evenly settled in the dispersed pattern characteristic of maguey-terraced farms. Such rural farming villages had been founded in the 12th and 13th centuries, presumably by pioneering maguey-farming migrants coming from the north as part of the Toltec migrations (Calnek, 1982:44-46; Carrasco, 1979a; Sahagún, 1961:167; M. Smith, 1984).

"Toltec" migrants actually were from many different ethnic groups and the migrations are know by some of the more important component linguistic and ethnic groups, thus, "Toltec", "Chichimec", or "Nahua" migrations (Sahagún, 1961:195-197). Language provides clues to the ethnic composition of the Basin in the Early Postclassic period, the dawn of Central Mexico's historic age (Harvey, 1972). Languages in greatest use in the Basin of Mexico in the 16th century were Nahua, Otomi, Chichimec, and Popolacan. Nahua became the most widely-spoken language in the Basin by 1521, the official language of every legitimate polity and lingua franca over Mesoamerica. It is presumed to have been the language in use at Tula and its allied communities; whether it was the language in use at ancient Teotihuacan is still debated.

Events of the migration period are among the earliest described, if cryptically, in native histories preserved in the Early Colonial period. The epic journey of the pioneering migrant Xolotl is recounted in several major documents (Codex Xolotl, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl; see discussions in Calnek, 1973; Charlton, 1973; Davies, 1980a; Dibble, 1980; and Offner, 1983:18-26). Xolotl and his entourage (estimated at between several hundred and over a million people; Offner 1983:22) arrived in the Basin of Mexico after the fall of Tula (ca. A.D. 1200), and his visit to the Teotihuacan Valley is depicted in Plancha 1 of the Codex Xolotl. Teotihuacan is depicted intact, and the upper valley town of Oxtotipac is shown.

In the upper valley, Otumba may have already been established (earliest occupation may date to as early as A.D. 900), from obsidian hydration dates and Mazapan phase ceramics (Nichols and Charlton, 1995). Cihuatecpan and other similar sites in the upper valley shared Otumba's ceramic sequence (Evans, 1988a; Parsons, Evans, and Charlton, 1996), indicating general contemporaneity and probable establishment during the first waves of migration from the Tula region. Obsidian hydration analysis of Pachuca obsidian from several residences at Cihuatecpan (Evans and Freter) resulted in a range of dates from A.D. 1221 to 1568 (n = 97), possibly indicating that occupation of the rural sites may
have occurred at a slightly later date than at Otumba. Ceramics included local variants of the Red-on-Buff wares common in the Central Highlands during the Toltec period (Early Postclassic). The Black-Orange tradition began in the Teotihuacan Valley with Aztec II: Aztec I did not occur, although it was common in nearby Xaltocan, the Otomi capital, in contexts radiocarbon-dated to as early as the 9th century (Brumfield and Frederick, 1992:30). The lack of a shared ceramic tradition between two adjacent regions suggests lack of a common ethnic heritage, thus non-Otomi roots for Otumba and other sites in the upper Teotihuacan Valley.

The scenario of migration into the Teotihuacan Valley might have involved the arrival over several centuries of small groups of immigrants. They entered a landscape where the permanently-irrigated lands was already controlled, and the political security necessary in the militaristic Postclassic period could only be provided by joining an established city-state. Wherever they settled, it would be at the sufferance of a local ruler, and the settlers would become that ruler’s vassals. The result was mutually beneficial: the migrants were permitted to settle on unoccupied piedmont land suited to their skills as arid-land farmers, the rulers gained new populations of tributaries and extended and secured their hold over marginal zones (and the more readily intensified areas they bordered). Administration of these small tributary communities offered employment opportunities for otherwise under-employed junior members of the local dynasties.

Otumba and its adjacent smaller communities (Charlton, 1972b) may have been established with the permission of a city-state ruler (tlatoani) who assigned a program of tribute payments. Archaeological remains indicate rapid population increases and settlements system expansion in the subsequent Middle Postclassic period.

Politically, the upper Teotihuacan Valley was an unstable element, repeatedly resisting incorporation into larger political confederations during the Postclassic. Otumba did not have its own noble ruler until the 15th century (Gerhard, 1993:207). Before it became a city-state capital, it may have been subordinate to another, older and larger center such as Teotihuacan (Gibson, 1964:18). In the late 14th century Otumba was apparently a vassal of Xolotl’s descendants, who ran the Acolhua domain from their capital in Texcoco. As a tlatoani domain, Otumba derived from lands granted by Xolotl’s great-great-grandson, the Texcocan ruler Techotlalatzin "to Otomi refugees from Xaltocan" (Hicks, 1986:44, citing Alva Ixtilxóchitl, 1975-1977:2:361) after the Tepanecs ordered its destruction in about 1395.

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1 The earliest occupation on Cerro San Lucas, Cihuatepec’s geographical location, occurred the Terminal Formative, evidenced by concentrations of sherds dated to ca. A.D. 1 (Sanders et al., 1976) on the western slope. There is no evidence of Classic period occupation; most of the valley’s population lived in Teotihuacan itself.
These refugees may have been imposed on the upper valley to neutralize or punish Otumba's non-corporation with Texcoco, which had remained unpopular in this area. In 1418, the Texcocan ruler was assassinated near Otumba, and the Acolhua domain was taken over by the Tepanecs, who made Otumba and Acolman their Teotihuacan Valley capitals, presumably because these towns were their traditional allies (Carrasco, 1984b; Hassig, 1988:136). With the return of Acolhua rule in the 1430s, Otumba remained a city-state capital, receiving tribute goods and services from its vassal communities, and passing a share along to its capital at Texcoco. Cihuatepec may have been a vassal community of Otumba, and if a Relación Geográfica existed for the upper valley (Cline, 1972) we might draw inferences about Precolumbian political alliances from the cabecera-sujeto patterns extant in the late 16th century. Instead, our most reliable source for such relationships is the Arzobispado de Mexico of 1571, which lists Cihuatepec (as “San Lucas”) as among Otumba's ecclesiastical subjects (Paso y Troncoso, 1905:83).

Precolumbian patterns of political alliance and tribute payments were very complex and overlapping, and Cihuatepec may have owed tributes to several other towns. No documentation reveals whether or not Cihuatepec became involved in the 1515 secessionist rebellion against the Acolhua confederation, in which the rebel leader Ixtlilxóchitl established his capital at Otumba "by force" (Gibson, 1964:18).

The Spanish conquest (1519-21) unfolded in various importante cities in Mexico, but rural Cihuatepec had a front row seat on one of the most important events. The Battle of Otumba was fought in July 1520 on the plain bordering Cihuatepec. The Spaniards, having narrowly escaped death in Tenochtitlan, were fleeing east through the Teotihuacan Valley, toward their allies in Tlaxcala. On the Plain of Otumba they turned and fought massed native armies, inflicting heavy damage. We cannot know the feelings and perceptions of the Cihuatepecos as they witnessed —possibly some participated in— the hell of that decisive battle, the unfamiliar sights and sounds and smells and strength of gunpowder, horses, war dogs, armor and swords. Victory won, the Spaniards, and their allies trooped past or through Cihuatepec. Villagers observing the battle may have understood that the end had begun.

Cortés and his forces regrouped and returned to the Basin of Mexico to conquer the Mexica, and this time their allies included the ruler of Texcoco, to whom Otumba owed allegiance. Cihuatepecos may have been pressed into service in the months-long siege against Tenochtitlan. After the conquest, Cortés himself became the encomendero of Otumba, a grant which probably included nearby Cihuatepec, and residents thus owed him service and goods. But by 1528 Cortés was stripped of this and other properties, and in 1530 Otumba became a crown province (Gibson, 1964:60), with an administrative officer (corregidor) assigned in 1531 (Gerhard, 1993:208).
Cihuatecpan was part of Colonial Otumba's religious administrative district, and probably of its civil jurisdiction as well. Ceramics from the Colonial period occur at the site in much lower frequencies than the predominant Aztec III Black-on-Orange. Types include Aztec IV Black-on-Orange and several kinds of glazed ware. The extent to which the relative scarcity of Colonial wares reflects either conservatism in adopting different styles or the ongoing reduction in population size is unknown. Only a few metal objects were found at Cihuatecpan (Evans, ed., 1988), but there were abundant samples of obsidian from all phases, and Charlton (1972) found that obsidian was widely used in upper valley villages in the 16th century.

In 1571 a census of Otumba's regional population was conducted (Paso y Troncoso, 1905:82-83), and indicated a population of under 600 at Cihuatecpan, a decline from a Late Postclassic population estimated at about 1000 (assuming average household size of ca. 5, at ca. 200 houses, see Evans, ed., 1988). Thus Cihuatecpan was an exemplary case of the general and severe demographic decline in the newly-contacted Americas (Sanders, 1992). This topic has been much studied, and recent overviews and simulations by geographers (Butzer, 1992; Lowell, 1992; Whitmore, 1992) nicely summarize relevant data and interpretations, demonstrating the magnitude of the consequences of this episode of culture contact. In the Basin of Mexico, the population declined from 1.6 million in 1519 to 25000 by about 1610 (Sanders, 1992:179). Disease and overwork wracked the population, and these plagues only hint at what must have been very severe spiritual demoralization as the beliefs shared over millennia were declared anathema and seemed proven impotent.

The document that preserved Cihuatecpan's Nahua name ("San Lucas Cihuatecpac") was its death warrant: an order of congregateión dated October 3, 1603 (Archivo General de la Nación; general discussion in Simpson, 1934). These orders were sometimes not carried out, but archaeological evidence is commensurate with an early 17th century date of abandonment for this site.

**Settlement Pattern and Subsistence**

Cihuatecpan (Figure 2) is typical of Teotihuacan Valley rural sites, with Late Toltec (Early Postclassic) settlement providing the nucleus for the expanded Aztec period (Middle and Late Postclassic) pattern. Pioneering Toltec/contact episode occupation was distributed widely over the lower slopes of Cerro San Lucas; the mature Aztec period settlement pattern was an upward and circum-cerro expansion. Site layout and setting are consistent with maguey farming.

2 Calculated using Cook and Borah's (1960) estimate of 2.8 persons per "vecino" (head-of-household).
Maguey-terrace villages were common in the Basin of Mexico in the Late Postclassic, particularly in the north and east, and they are also found in other areas of the central highlands. Maguey played a significant and necessary role in village life, providing a potable beverage in lands lacking any other, and also supplying nutrition (even when other crops failed) and raw materials for craft manufacture (Parsons and Parsons, 1990). Each of Cihuatepecan's households could have tended a kitchen garden (calmil) adjacent to the house, and a milpa further away on Cerro San Lucas (Evans, 1990). A total area of 1.6 ha per household was available. Planted with mixed maguey and seed and vegetable crops, this land could have provided the household with over 20 liters of fresh aguamiel per day (Evans, 1990:127) and a caloric yield of 13,500 kilocalories: plenty of drinkable liquid, significant nutrition, and a potent insurance policy against the exigencies of farming in a semi-arid environment. Probably not all maguey sap was drunk fresh, and there may be other factors in this simple model which reduce the optimal yield, but maguey farming clearly was a necessary strategy for survival and prosperity.

Maguey has been called "la vaca verde" (J. R. Parsons, personal communication, 1995) because, like the family dairy cow, it provides basic sustenance and requires daily tending to extract the precious milky liquid and use it as a staple potable beverage. Maguey also structured the settlement pattern: farmers needed to be close to their fields in order to tend the maguey and terraces efficiently (Drennan, 1988:285; Palerm, 1955:29; Sanders, 1965; Parsons and Parsons, 1990). Furthermore, dedication to maguey farming in all its phases (as opposed to monocropping pulque plantation operations of the Colonial era) encouraged a gender-based division of labor and was best-adapted to the joint extended family household with balanced sex ratio (Evans, 1990).

Houses, Households, and Social Organization

From surface remains, confirmed by test excavation, it appears that virtually all of Cihuatepecan's 203 tlateles were residential in function. The mounds were distributed over Cerro San Lucas' sloping piedmont (2,240 to 2,250 meters above sea level), an area of 3.3 km². Although there had been destruction of the archaeological site by erosion and a modest amount of bulldozing, the visible remains probably represented virtually all of the original occupation. The spacing of the mounds is fairly even around the cerro, and wholesale destruction seldom creates the type of pattern expressed here.

Size range and spatial distribution of house mounds show pronounced distinctions in size and proximity: larger mounds were found, more closely
spaced, on the hill's south side (Evans, ed., 1988:22, Figure 1.4). The establishment of the southern slope as the focus of population density and political administration must have occurred as the Early Postclassic population settled in, developing the terraces that would provide their livelihood (Evans, ed., 1988; Evans and Abrams, 1988).

This area drew our research interest in 1984, and here we investigated the remains of eight structures, the jagüey, and the obsidian dump. It should be noted that this set of excavated structures represents the largest such sample of excavated buildings from any Aztec-period community in the Basin of Mexico. Generalizations about building size, number of rooms, and quality of finishing are based on this very small sample, and on comparisons with other, similar communities within and beyond the Basin known from ethnohistory (Calnek, 1972:111; Carrasco, 1964, 1971b:368-369, 1972, 1976a; Cook and Borah, 1971:128; Harvey, 1985; Harvey and Williams, 1980; Offner, 1983:213-221, 291-298, 1984:138; Spores, 1984:104; Williams and Harvey, 1988), archaeological survey, and excavations (see plans in Charlton, 1972b:41, 51; Evans and Abrams, 1988; Paredes, 1986:242-252; Parsons, 1971; Parsons et al., 1982; M. Smith, 1992a).

We assume, from the site chronology and demographic generalizations about the Postclassic and Colonial periods (Sanders et al., 1979), that Cihuatecpan achieved its greatest extent in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and that most, if not all, the structures whose remains formed the archaeological site were in use at this time. Deriving an overall village population size from the number of house mounds is difficult because of the flexible and fluid nature of the Nahua household and family (Evans, 1989, 1993), but the average commoner residence may have housed about five people (Carrasco, 1971b:368-369; Offner, 1984:138), which would yield an estimated Cihuatecpan village size of about 1000.

The tlateloles we excavated were larger than average for the site, and the houses we uncovered probably had more rooms and more different kinds of rooms than the average residence. Figure 3 compares the plans of these structures, and Table 1 presents information about them and their hypothesized resident households, arranged in order from smallest to largest. The two smallest structures, 5W and 7, flanked the largest (Str. 6), and prior to excavation the three formed one huge tlatelol, ca. 70 m across. Str. 5 seems to have been a storehouse and/or workshop, and Str. 7, the smallest and shabbiest residence excavated, may have been the home of servants. Str. 6, three times the size of the next largest building, seems by its size, layout, and quality of finishing to have been the residence of a wealthy polygynous household, and was possibly the headman's residence, thus serving as the village tecpan or administrative palace (Evans, 1991, 1993). The other five structures (Str. 1, 2, 4, 9, and 10) formed a middle-tier group of residences with a considerable range of variation in size, complexity, and quality of finishing.
The variation among these houses is important to note, because it indicates that strong differentials in affluence existed in the village. From this can be inferred that economic and social mobility were present in Nahua society. Clearly, some individuals could by industry, alliance, and good fortune achieve a higher material standard of living (and, by extension, a higher position in the social hierarchy) than others. Building one's house with cut stone, surfacing floors with whitewash and adobe blocks, adding features like adobe banquets and even red paint on the wall—all cost more than simpler styles of construction (Margain, 1971:90), and indicate a range of socio-economic status within the community.

The range of residences, from Str. 7 through the middle class up to Str. 6, the possible tecpan, seems to represent the range of major social groups
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure*</th>
<th>5W</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exterior dimensions, m x m</td>
<td>6.8 x 7.0</td>
<td>6.6 x 10.2</td>
<td>11.5 x 12.8</td>
<td>9.0 x 13.0</td>
<td>11.2 x 12.0</td>
<td>10.7 x 16.4</td>
<td>14.6 x 9.8</td>
<td>24.0 x 25.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sum of interior space, m² rank</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>&lt;100</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>108.7</td>
<td>119.7</td>
<td>363.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>unknown</td>
<td>30° W of S</td>
<td>60° W of S</td>
<td>40° W of S</td>
<td>unknown</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of wall constr</td>
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<td>poor</td>
<td>very good</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>very good</td>
<td>excellent</td>
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<td>pumice cones</td>
<td>mud plaster, pumice cones</td>
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<td>pumice cones</td>
<td>mud plaster, red paint, pumice cones</td>
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<tr>
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<td>cascajo</td>
<td>cascajo</td>
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<td>cascajo</td>
<td>whitewash, adobe paving</td>
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<td>roof tiles, trenches</td>
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<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
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<td>unknown</td>
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<td>square adobe</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>pillars, possible temascal</td>
<td>burial, possible temascal</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitation room/area</td>
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<td>3/43.6 m²</td>
<td>27/unknown</td>
<td>3/42.7 m²</td>
<td>4/56.0 m²</td>
<td>4/50.16 m²</td>
<td>10/166.4 m²</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhabitants</td>
<td>6 x 4</td>
<td>9 x 6</td>
<td>6 x 6</td>
<td>9 x 6</td>
<td>9 x 6</td>
<td>12 ± 6</td>
<td>28 ± 12</td>
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</tr>
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<td>nuclear or joint</td>
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<td>joint</td>
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<td>polygyn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>workshop storage</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>house administrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in the larger society. Evidence is lacking for the lowest level of Nahua society, slaves, who represented a very small proportion of the population. Next would be workers attached to the land, whose efforts provided the support for religious and political functionaries, or who worked the states awarded to noble. The residents of Str. 7 may have been "tecpanpouhque... [tecpan people], who paid no tribute but served in the repair of the... tecpan" (Gibson, 1964:259). In Nahua society, tribute-payers were the macehualtin commoners, who held rights to their own lands. Part of their tribute obligation was service in work crews at the regional and confederation administrative palaces, so some work at the village tecpan may have been provided by village families other than Str. 7's residents, on a rotational basis. Artifact evidence seems to support Str. 7's anomalous position; that locus had much lower than average relative frequencies of maguey scrapers and spindle whorls (Evans), consistent with its residents' possible status as service worker specialists freed of the tribute obligations of land-holding commoners.

Land at Cihuatecpan was probably held corporately as a tiaxilacalli, by families associated in a calpulli (Caso, 1963:872-873; Schroeder, 1991:152-153 discusses usage of these terms by Chimalpahin). Such commoners, the macehualtin, formed the mass of the population in the Basin of Mexico during the Late Postclassic, and, we assume, the bulk of the population at Cihuatecpan. They would have paid some portion of their agricultural produce and their crafted goods in tribute to support local officials (the headman, the master of the telpochcalli) and to support regional and confederation officials, in contribution coordinated by the headman, who also presumably oversaw fulfillment of service and military obligations for Acolhua confederation.

The headman and his family would have represented the upper stratum of Nahua society, the hereditary nobles (pilli class). In analyzing Str. 6 (Evans, 1990), I argued that architectural features of the building were consistent with residence by a polygynous noble family. Although destroyed down to its wall bases, it exhibited fine touches of architectural finishing, such as red-painted lime-plastered walls, lavish use of cut stone, and well-planned features like a long strip of adobe paving in the floor of one room; with a tlequil-style cut stone hearth in its center. The building's layout indicated administrative functions, with its large central entry courtyard overlooked by a well-finished deliberation room, and storage rooms along the sides. The polygynous nature of the resident family was evidenced by the central deliberation room, appropriate for the personal quarters of the male household head, with outlying suites of smaller rooms for his wives and children. Two courtyards at the rear of the building held circular structures which were probably terrazcales (see also Paredes, 1986:237). Analysis of the artifact assemblage revealed that Str. 6 had an unusually high relative proportion of spindle whorls, consistent with an unbalanced adult sex ratio favoring adult women. Str. 6's relative proportion of maguey
scrapers was the lowest of all buildings as the site, consistent with a dearth of resident adults males harvesting maguey leaves and processing them into fiber (Evans). The house and its associated artifacts are appropriate for a resident high-status polygynous family.

Cihuatecpan and the Larger Political Economy

The headman was the local representative not only of the highest social stratum in the larger society, but also of Nahua political authority and the economic power it commanded. The sociopolitical order formed a dendritic tribute system for channeling goods and services up from Cihuatecpan and countless other villages, through the regional city-state capitals to confederation capitals such as Texcoco and Tenochtitlan (Smith and Hodge, 1994). Villagers also would have traded their products at the Otumba market, thus participating in local and long-distance exchange.

Cihuatecpan’s location determined its economic specializations. Maguey farming has been discussed above in several contexts, and maguey products probably accounted for the bulk of materials produce in the village. With the exceptions of Str. 6 and 7, all residences yielded evidence of fiber processing (maguey scrapers and spindle whorls) and the residents of Str. 1 may have specialized in pulque production (Evans, 1990). Elsewhere I have argued that maguey farmers consumed the bulk of their maguey sap fresh, as aguamiel, and that this was an important part of their adaptation to this semi-arid environment. Fermented sap (pulque) was very important for medicinal, festival, and ritual purposes, and was probably drunk regularly if infrequently by the villagers. Aguamiel is notoriously unstable, fermenting a few days after harvest, but the production of good-quality pulque requires careful processing, including access to large quantities of water for scrupulous cleaning of the equipment (Parsons and Parsons, 1990). Evidence for specialized pulque production at Str. 1 is artifactual (extremely high proportions of basins and jars, higher-than-normal numbers of maguey scrapers) and locational (the building is next to the jagüey).

Spinning took place in every house, and we assume that weaving did, as well, although no material evidence remains. Spindle whorls recovered from surface survey and excavation are fairly evenly divided between small (for cotton) and large (for maguey; see M. Parsons, 1972a, 1975 for general discussion). Maguey spinning of village-processed fiber would have resulted in thread and fabrics for home use and trade, perhaps even marketplace exchange (maguey textiles are not specified as tribute items in the few sources available, but our information is far from complete). Spinning (and weaving) cotton may have required raw material purchase in the marketplace, and thus required the production, for market, of a surplus good to trade.
Sometimes the archaeological record leaves no trace of what may have been a very lucrative locally-produced item. In Cihuatecpan’s case, the production of cochineal dye is indicated by its importance in the Colonial economy (Cook, 1971:219-220) and in the area around and northeast of Otumba (Gibson, 1964:354). Nopal cactus, the host for the cochineal insect, was no doubt at least as common on Cerro San Lucas in antiquity as it is today, cultivated for fruit and paddles. Cochineal dye, or fabrics dyed with cochineal, may have been an economically significant local product, but processing uses facilities and tools (sweat baths, mortar-and-pestles) that are used for other purposes, and so treasured is the substance that vessels are carefully rinsed to provide a last, weak dye bath, and remove all trace of the product (Ross, 1986).

Cerro San Lucas’ ground surface is crunchy with obsidian debris, indicating a specialization in tool production from this locally-available raw material that occurred at many communities in the Teotihuacan Valley (Spence and Parsons, 1972). The Otumba obsidian mine is a few km to the southeast, and Cihuatecpanecos may have used obsidian mined there, but they also seem to have been exploiting obsidian cobbles deposited locally and found in outwashes. Debitage indicates production of unifacially-and bifacially-flaked tools such as scrapers and knives. Artifact assemblages from residential contexts included Otumba black obsidian, and green obsidian prismatic blades (no doubt from one of the Pachuca sources) in a 2:1 ratio, respectively.

These products of local village industry are only the most visible —archaeologically and ethnohistorically— of a range of goods that were processed and made by the villagers, some of which would have met its tribute requirements. No documentary evidence specific to Cihuatecpan’s tribute payment exists, but clues may be gained from the Codex Mendoza (Berdan and Anawalt, 1992a, b) and from Motolinía’s Memoríales. Pages 21V and 22R of the Codex Mendoza list 26 towns, including upper Teotihuacan Valley towns (Otumba, Aztecameca, Tepeapulco, and Ahuatepec). Carrasco (1991:102) suggests some management of these towns by Tenochtitlan; goods required are bins of maize, beans, chia, and amaranth (Barlow, 1949:71), textiles and clothing, including elaborate war costumes. Otis Charlton, Charlton, and Nichols (1993:158) document a 1531 tribute payment in clothing by Otumba (Archivo General de Indias). Motolinía (1971:394-395) documents the Acolhua domain’s requirement of construction materials, firewood, and lumber, as well as labor.

Note that the tribute requirements forced the villages to participate in the larger economy by demanding that they pay tribute in goods not locally available, such as cotton cloth, and feathers for war costumes. This made effective use of the labor force and also stimulated by economy by ensuring a market for exotic raw materials.
Goods and services thus circulated through intermeshing tribute and exchange systems, the latter centered on marketplaces and running the extent of Mesoamerica in long-distance exchange networks administered by pochteca merchants. Cihuatecpan's links to these systems were again defined by its location. The area of dense settlement on the south slope of Cerro San Lucas spanned the traditional Otumba-to-Apam route, which linked the Teotihuacan Valley with the Totonac region and Gulf lowlands (Gibson, 1964:361). Otumba had one of the major pochteca depots (Sahagún, 1959:49), the first in the Basin of Mexico to be reached by merchant caravans entering the Basin from the northeast after a journey of weeks or even months. An hour before arriving in Otumba the merchants and porters would pass through Cihuatecpan, and the village may have been a traditional place for merchants to stop, take refreshment, and hear the latest news before the last leg of a long journey. Thus Cihuatecpan was much less isolated from the realm of urban-oriented trade than were many other villages, and Cihuatecpaneos were certainly close enough to Otumba to visit the town and its market frequently.

Cihuatecpan: Belief System as Folk Tradition

Just as the Aztec economy was powered by the work of countless farmer-artisans, the belief system was grounded in the piety of the common people. Artifactual evidence for ritual activity at Cihuatecpan consists of figurines, incense burners, and musical instruments. Architectural evidence for ritual activity is less conspicuous. No structures have been identified as dedicated to ritual use, but some village rituals could have been held in Str. 6's entry courtyard, an area of 66 m². There are no pyramids at the site, though a pyramid and dance platform occurs several km to the southeast, in the alluvial plain between Cihuatecpan and Ahuatepec. In discussing dispersed villages, Sanders et al. (1979:166, 168) noted that "At considerable intervals within such linear settlement bands we often encountered small ceremonial-civic precincts formed of distinctive architecture: a small temple platform, several lower platforms..." Otumba, of course, would have had urban-scale ceremonial architecture, where rites drew upon a supra-village population, and occurred less frequently than the myriad daily and mundane practices.

Because so many daily activities were suffused with ritual (Ruiz de Alarcón, 1984) virtually all spaces were ritual contexts, and it is not surprising that sherds of figurines and incense burners were found generally distributed throughout the site. Domestic architecture incorporates ritual life in its walls, where deity images (figurines) were displayed, and in actual built-in niches. Durán (1964:106) describes shrines as "small rooms similar to the ones in which they keep the saints today. They were used only for
this purpose" and may have resembled closet-like spaces such as Str. 4 room B or Str. 6 room H, although neither of these spaces bears any archaeological evidence of ritual use (Evans and Abrams, 1988:95, 131).

Figurine fragments are everywhere at Aztec periods sites (M. Parsons, 1972b). At Cihuatecpan they occurred in all residences, in all excavation contexts (surface, plowzone, floor zone, subfloor fill, midden). Most depicted female deities associated with sexuality and childbirth (Sullivan, 1982). Durán (1971:419) described the April fertility rites of Tozozontli, feast of the Small Perforation, when “[e]veryone went out to sow his fields and properties... In most places ropes were strung from tree to tree in the cornfields. From these cords hung at even distances a number of small effigies...” Children who had fasted diligently during this time were rewarded by the “soothsayers of each town” with amulets, including figurines.

Durán’s description of these necklaces, strung with... small figures of clay or stone, offers a solution to a problem frequently encountered by the archaeologist in Mexico seeking to explain the function of the thousands of small clay figurines found in excavations and in the farmers’ cornfields. These small images — often representing the Mother Goddess, Tonantzin, or the Rain God, Tlaloc — are usually perforated, as though meant to be strung on necklaces. Others undoubtedly served magical functions as fetishes or were used in funerary rites, while still others served as lares and penates (Durán, 1971:420, Note 1).

At the site, contexts of artifactual use were very rare, but the association of abundant figurine fragments with the probable temascalés (steam baths) in the rear courtyards of Str. 6 was extremely strong. Nearly 25 percent of Str. 6’s figurines occurred in these contexts, and the majority depicted Xochiquetzal. Given that the temascal was an important locus for curing (Costumbres...; Noriega Hope, 1922:241), and that reproductive health crises were likely to be the most serious and common for most adult women, this artifact concentration is no doubt behaviorally significant.

Music was an integral part of ritual life, and several types of musical instruments were found. Flute fragments were common, whistles were also found, and one example of a bone rasp (omichicahuastli) was deep inside a midden adjacent to Str. 2. The omichicahuastli was a familiar instrument in the Nahua repertoire (Sahagún, 1969:2:313), usually played by resting in on a resonator (cranium or squash), while strumming over the notches with a stick or scapula. “The Spanish considered its music to be ‘extremely doleful’” (Stevenson, 1952:10, citing Tezozomoc’s, Crónica Mexicana), possibly because it was used in funerary rites, possibly because the human femur was a favorite raw material for these instruments. The Cihuatecpan example was the right size to have been made of human bone, but further analysis indicated that the bone was from a tapir (Evans and Valadez, 1995). For all the sanguinary reasons that the Aztecs capture the public imagination, discovering a human bone modified for ritual use would have been a quintessentially Aztec archaeological experience, but finding
evidence of a tropical tapir in the cool arid upper Teotihuacan Valley is an even richer explanatory challenge. Perhaps this exotic artifact came to the village from the Gulf lowlands via the trade route.

Conclusions

This broken, crudely worked tapir-bone rasp is one of the treasures of Cihuatecpan. Compared to the treasures of the Templo Mayor, it is unprepossessing; it will never be featured in a Cihuatecpan site museum, and the tecpan and other buildings have been relegated to their pre-excavations existence, buried under the plowzone. Hundreds of villagers lived and died at Cihuatecpan over the course of its 400 years as a community, and like the millions of other Aztec villagers they had no hope of immortality in painted books and carved stone. We can name the Mexica rulers of Tenochtitlan, but the names of Cihuatecpan's commoners are lost forever.

Cihuatecpan itself, however, has achieved a new life as a window on the Aztec culture. From its houses and tools, ornaments and amulets we know the common people as inventive in their adaptation to this harsh environment, skilled at making what they needed for themselves and for others, sensitive to the aesthetic dimensions of their domestic surroundings, and pious toward their gods. The physical evidence of their lives substantiates and corrects the perspectives gained from ethnohistory, and continues to reveal this important dimension of the Aztec world.

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