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Research design and dialogue: dynamics of participatory archaeology in Chalcatongo and Yosondua, Mixteca Alta, Mexico

Alexander Geurds

This paper illustrates the collaborative aspects of archaeological research in two communities in the southern Mixteca Alta region of Oaxaca, Mexico. Whilst in several parts of the world archaeologists have developed multiple ways of informing, involving and collaborating with local communities, the case-study presented here observes that internal communal divisions determine the dialogue of archaeologist and community members and that an awareness of the political and social context underlying these divisions needs to be central to such participatory approaches. This paper, based on field seasons conducted between 1998 and 1999, first presents a background to the role of communities in the regional archaeological tradition, followed by a brief discussion of the results of a non-systematic survey project undertaken in the two communities. These results – and the project goals that led to them – are then compared to the mentioned local context that shaped the project. It is concluded that this contemporary context ultimately determined the possibilities to develop the aspired participatory elements.

1 Introduction

The last three decades have witnessed a growing debate on the politically charged relationship between archaeological field investigations and the communal position of local stakeholders, much of this in the arena of postcolonial studies and archaeological heritage debates (see Schlanger *et al*. 2013 for one of numerous available overviews). For several world regions, case-studies have emerged, with a noticeable regional emphasis on case studies from parts of Asia, Australia, and North America. Archaeological projects with an explicitly community-oriented focus originate in regions or nations where stakeholders in the local past have come forward. Parallel to this, archaeological management strategies are valorizing research along lines of societal impact and engagement. In this development, indigenous peoples seen cultural descendants represent an important segment, but are certainly not the only one: in principle, all contemporary inhabitants close to an archaeological site qualify in this set of practices, as a community that can interact with the archaeological investigation.

The Mixteca Alta region in southern Mexico has not yet witnessed the same amount of organized voices for cultural self-representation that is coming from the abovementioned other areas of the world. The demand for a legislative voice or meaningful control over local archaeological heritage through management of sites as well as authorizing archaeological research activities, was not often found in the Mixteca at the turn of the millennium. Whereas archaeologists engaged in research focused on the local indigenous past in numerous parts of North America, Australia, the Near East and Asia, reconsidered some of the basic dimensions of their practice, in the Mixteca this has occurred only on the local, incidental level. Indeed, how archaeologists regard their own research practice is one of the elements in generating locally engaged investigations. For example, the critical views on historical archaeology being conducted in North America have grown in recent years (Harrison and Schofield 2010; Leone 2005; Schmidt and Patterson 1995), and this critical self-awareness in archaeology will probably continue to be a presence in the near future. The impact of US federal legislation addressing issues of Native American cultural ownership is having on the archaeological practice, is far-reaching and certainly not yet fully addressed nor to be considered ideal (Watkins 2005; 2006). The issue of who gets to interpret whose history remains a deeply political one, and indeed powerful proof that political matters, and social context therefore, are inextricably linked to the archaeology of precolonial material culture on the American continent.

In this ongoing shift in autonomy, the unrestricted access to cultural remains, enjoyed by nationally authorized archaeological investigations, is eroding, creating an arena of power in which the authority over sites, material culture and collections, in other words over the past itself, is by definition subject to negotiation. By now several decades of dialogue between individual and indigenous organized bodies, ranging in scale from a local community to the UNPFII[1], have resulted in a profound transformation of the archaeological praxis. In contrast, even though some indigenous individuals from the Mixteca Alta have been actively involved in for example UN forums from the 1980s onward, the impact of

these indigenous voices on archaeology remains incidental. Elsewhere, the field praxis of archaeology has and continues to change due to the dialogue between archaeologist and local stakeholders in the indigenous past.

The repositioning of archaeologist and his praxis serves the following three related goals. First, avoiding entirely losing authority on the material remains in light of local stakeholder concerns and demands. Secondly, to improve the overall involvement and exchange between archaeologist and local stakeholder and, third, to let this mentioned interaction mutually benefit archaeological findings and local historical knowledge. The concept that emerged in the early 2000s from all these efforts is that of community archaeology, by now one of the fast-growing sub-fields within archaeology (Davidson *et al*. 1995; Geurds and Van Broekhoven 2006; Geurds 2007; Marshall 2002). A large segment of the archaeological research taking place within community archaeology is oriented toward reflexive approaches to its praxis and an awareness of the delicate territorial and power-laden political position taken up by the archaeologist in the local context (Tully 2007). The individual experiences by archaeologists in the field have led to initiatives to further the perceived relevance and more generally the local *communis opinio* on archaeological field projects. Community archaeology initiatives are therefore oftentimes not so much planned methodology as they are responses to social contexts that present themselves in the field praxis. This reflects ethical considerations on the archaeological praxis from recent years (*e.g*. Meskell and Pels 2005; Scarre and Scarre 2006; Vitelli 1996; Zimmerman *et al*. 2003), which are characterized by attempts to outline ethically 'good practice' as well as making attempts at defining the importance of local social contexts to archaeology.[2]

This paper is based on research undertaken in 1998 and 1999 when a total of six months was spent living in the community of Chalcatongo de Hidalgo in the Mixteca Alta region in southeastern Mexico (fig. 1). The data presented here aim to demonstrate how the need to develop a community approach became evident during the field research in addition to the predefined goals for establishing a record of surveyed archaeological sites. Secondly, the transition from intention to outcome is presented and discussed, shifting the balance from assumed community coherence to the observed multitude of local identities and interests and thereby challenging some of the earlier assumptions that initially fuel collaborations with stakeholders (see also Smith and Waterton 2009). The adaptations that this project underwent revolved around a) the changing interaction with community members the field crew experienced as the project began and evolved and, b) the reflection by the field crew members on their position in the community. The interaction and dialogue that the field crew had with members of the Chalcatongo community when the project was introduced and submitted, and the expressed examples of interest and disinterest by inhabitants, had significant impact on the subsequent development of the mentioned participatory engagement. Accordingly, the particular nature of the various local social contexts, in part defined by power structures, will be outlined. The influence of these contexts and subsequent importance for participatory archaeology will be stressed.

The discussion this paper offers consists of two parts. I set out by describing the background of the archaeological knowledge concerning the Mixteca Alta and the results from the survey conducted in the Chalcatongo and Yosondua valleys. This part also provides a brief background to community archaeology and the collaboration it sets out to accomplish. The second part consists of a reflexive analysis on the contexts of interaction with the involved villages of Chalcatongo and Yosondua. This analysis allows for identifying the dilemmas of conducting community archaeology in practice, contrasting to some of the traditional community-based archaeological methods. It will show that submission of research plans and community consultation did not have the aspired impact as to enable a successful community-based archaeological project. Even though this consultation and dialogue with the municipal leadership has become standard practice in professional archaeology in the Mixteca, the reality in these settings shows a divided and contentious perspective on the communal archaeological heritage.

The Mixteca Alta region is marked by the colonial-era legacy of a highly fragmented political landscape and, as a result, long-term territorial feuds that scar the social landscape, divorcing nearby communities, and not infrequently resulting in violent conflict (Stephen 1997).



Figure 1 Villa Chalcatongo de Hidalgo

Archaeology in this region is locally viewed through multiple lenses, but it is at least a delicate and sometimes conflictive enterprise. Looking to other world regions, community archaeology surely holds promising new avenues for dialogue and participation but, as this paper will demonstrate, the implementation of previously established guidelines of conduct and communication, does not necessarily lead to improved local understanding or a more harmonious field project.

2 Participatory approaches in the Mixteca Alta

It's a commonplace to state that archaeological projects have to some degree always sought to achieve the involvement of local residents in the Mixteca Alta. The regional archaeology has traditionally depended on working out an arrangement with landowners on which an archaeological site is situated; relaying government permits for archaeological investigations and possibly contracting local workers in excavation activities. Thinking on how to critically consider archaeological research and its outcomes in the Mixteca Alta is considerably more recent (see Pérez Rodríguez 2013:101-104 for an overview), as is striving to model the diffusion of research results (Pérez Rodríguez 2002) or an analysis of patrimony management (Johnson 2009; Robles Garcia 1996). What comes out of this are methods to successfully communicate with local residents that might otherwise potentially complicate the particular archaeological project. The municipal political complexity of the Mixteca Alta community San Pedro y San Pablo Teposcolula is a prime example of the disenfranchisement of political leadership and factions in the general populace, complicating the archaeological enterprise (Johnson 2009; Santos Pérez 2008). The majority of work thus aims to achieve ethically virtuous forms of consultation with local Mixtec communities. However, though still rare, archaeological research is beginning to emerge that frames local involvement as more central to the project as such, foregrounding questions of oral history, knowledge of sacred landscapes and co-created research impact initiatives (Jiménez Osorio and Posselt Santoyo 2015; Zborover 2015).

For the better part of the twentieth century, the majority of communicative arrangements were either provided for by state or national legislations or contained within fieldwork conducted as part non-state commissioned individual archaeological projects. The worldwide increase in recent decades of indigenous peoples striving for cultural recognition, recuperation, as well as more broadly for political and territorial self-determination, has run parallel to more attention to the ethical sides of how the archaeological praxis is constituted (Derry and Malloy 2003; Dongoske *et al*. 2000; Marshall 2002; Shackel and Chambers 2004; Swidler *et al*. 1997; Thomas 2000; Watkins 2001). It is no longer a radical position to claim that archaeology strives for a more humane society (McGuire 2008) and it can be argued that efforts for a more open and inclusive discipline are part of this. These wider developments also continually give rise to efforts in the Mixteca Alta to seek a merger in the interests of both descendant communities and archaeology. Though not a term actively used in the Mixteca, the main conceptual heading to develop during the 1990s as a result of this in other world regions remains community archaeology.[3] Community archaeology transcends mere negotiation and consultation and attempts to actively involve local stakeholders in the archaeological process. Effectively attempting to perceive community members as equal partners in a given project, community members are encouraged to participate in co-determining the direction of research, data analysis, and the eventual management of materials for archival and locally meaningful educational purposes.

Part of the essence of community involvement with archaeology in the Mixteca is illustrated by the publication record. As a region marked in recent history by an abundance of small rural settlements, the interaction of archaeologists with these communities has been frequent and goes back to archaeology's earliest presence in the Mixteca Alta. As early as the reports by Alfonso Caso, a pioneer of Mixteca archaeology, the traces of this interaction are visible. During his first visit to the community of Santiago Tilantongo, Caso explicitly mentions Esteban Avendaño, an inhabitant of that community, on multiple occasions. Namely, he refers to him as the person who pointed out the presence of the Late Formative period (300-0 BC) site of Monte Negro, and is quite likely the one who guided Caso and his associates from the centre of Tilantongo up the Cerro Negro hill to indicate the precise location of the site.[4] Avendaño is mentioned in the report as the *vigilante de la zona Mixteca* (Caso 1938:52) and even features prominently on one of the included photographs (ibid.:55). Ironically, this early prominence also seems to have been the final depiction of a local inhabitant of the Mixteca Alta in *any* archaeological report published since 1937.[5] Currently, the status of people living at or near the many archaeological sites in the Mixteca Alta is peripheral to archaeological narratives, restricted to the front matter and article acknowledgments. This is the primary location where local knowledge is explicitly reflected on by the author of the archaeological text.

Despite the apparent invisibility in publications, few would argue that local residents are *not* an integral part of archaeological research in the Mixteca Alta. Through description of the circumstances in which archaeological research takes place in combination with the background of all those involved, it can be attempted to illuminate the structures and forces responsible for the production of

knowledge about the archaeological past. The local public involved, and the partnership an archaeologist might undertake with that public, co-determines the political impact a project may have locally. That is, how the established partnership and the ensuing generated knowledge is used by individuals and groups within the local public. The application of community archaeology effectively acknowledges the influence that various types of social contexts have on the archaeological praxis, and turns it into its focus of analysis.

The archaeological handling of the past in the Mixteca Alta shows an apparent contrast to archaeologies in other indigenous contexts, where the participatory approach is more central to archaeological field practices, yet an answer as to why this disparity has come about is not easily available. Placing the causality primarily among archaeologists active in the region would disregard the many sincere efforts of archaeologists grappling with this issue at some stage of the project. The example of research projects from the neighboring Mixteca de la Costa region, offers stimulating contrasts to the Mixteca Alta.[6] Moreover, the Mixteca does not seem to be an isolate in this matter, since comparable situations can be found in other parts of Mexico. When comparing Mexico to settler colonies like those of Australia and the US, it can be observed that these have undergone divergent paths concerning the political position of the respective indigenous peoples living there, even though in all those locations indigenous peoples are facing tremendous societal challenges. The legislative voice achieved in both nations is thought to be different from the *de facto* non-status of different indigenous identities in Mexico. Even though UN legislation was passed concerning the indigenous peoples and later also by the Mexican federal government, it did not much more than acknowledge their existence, thus remaining far removed from the situation in Australia and the US. This is not to say that those two nations demonstrate a flawless ability to involve indigenous people, but it is on a formal basis certainly much more central to archaeology. It also provides insight into why Mexican academic degree programs in archaeology are still firmly rooted in the processual stance, when compared to North American archaeological praxis that may be considered in a state of flux. Archaeologists trained in North America have had to rethink fundamental aspects of their practice and many now approach their discipline in very different ways. This shift has arguably been the most determining development in the practice of archaeology after the introduction of processual archaeology (Hegmon 2003; Watkins 2003). The seeming disparity seen up until now in archaeological research in the Mixteca Alta can be understood as resulting from the lack of formal need as well as the absence of a Mixtec organization providing challenging cultural critiques on parts of some of the local archaeological research tradition. The national situatedness of indigenous peoples in Mexico (and numerous other Latin American nations) has quite possibly indirectly impeded the growth of an identifiable indigenous voice regarding archaeology, which, even though problematic in itself, might have *forced* archaeology to reconsider its field praxis, rather than merely *contemplate* changing it.[7]

The example of Chalcatongo stands to illustrate the problems that arise when community-based archaeology is applied in the fragmented socio-political realities that constitute many villages in the Mixteca Alta. Although Chalcatongo stands out for its increase in urban development it has witnessed since the 1970s to the present day, it is certainly not unique in the Mixteca Alta with regard to long-running intra-communal social conflicts, which perhaps only intensified due to this urban growth. As such, it makes it a fitting case-study for the application of participatory archaeology in a Mixteca Alta community.

3 The project area

The archaeology of the Southern Mixteca Alta where Chalcatongo and Yosondua are located is somewhat represented in published work (cf. Spores and Balkansky 2013, but see Whittington and Workinger 2015 and Kowalewski *et al*. 2009, 272-284). In contrast to the relatively extensive surface surveying conducted in other parts of the Mixteca Alta, as well as on the coastal Mixteca, this transitional region from the elevated highlands to the tropical lowlands is all but well understood. Recent surface surveying around Tlaxiaco, Cuquila and Chalcatongo and excavations at Achiutla are now providing promising new data to begin to address this gap (Davenport and Golden 2016; Forde 2016; Jiménez Osorio and Posselt Santoyo 2012; 2015; 2016). Despite its important geographical position, characterized by narrow canyons and mountain passes that connect the tropical coastal environment to the more temperate highland, archaeology has focused predominantly on long-term projects in either coastal river valley research (*e.g*. Joyce 1991; 1993; 1994; 2010; Joyce and Goman 2012; Joyce *et al*. 2004) or projects situated more northerly in the Mixteca Alta (Balkansky 2000 *et al*; Barba Pingarron *et al*. 2009; Byland and Pohl 1994; Heredia Espinoza 2008; Kowalewksi *et al*. 2009; Pérez Rodríguez 2003; Spores 1972; Stiver 2001) and the adjacent Mixteca Baja (Rivera Guzmán 2008). This lacuna was the original motivation to start building an inventory of the archaeological settlements present in the Chalcatongo and Yosondua valleys and study the socio-political relationship they may have maintained to their neighboring areas.

The village of Villa Chalcatongo de Hidalgo is situated in the heart of the southern Mixteca Alta. The modern

municipality covers an area of 111 square kilometers and is politically placed within the Tlaxiaco District, as is Santiago Yosondua. The name Chalcatongo is of Nahuatl origin (*chalco* = 'Place of Jade'; *atenco* = 'at the lip (border, side) of the water' and translates to English as 'Place at the edge of the water'. It is estimated, though never geologically verified, that at some point during the pre-Hispanic period a body of water existed in the lowest area of the valley where agricultural activities are concentrated today. The municipal territory is bordered by those of San Miguel El Grande to the south-west, west, and north-west; by Santa Catarina Ticuá to the north-west, north, and north-east; by Santa Cruz Tacahua to the east, south-east, and south; and lastly by Santo Domingo Ixcatlán to the south and by Santa Lucía Monteverde to the south and south-west, with Santiago Yosondua bordering on Ixcatlán.

Santiago Yosondua is derived from the Mixtec (*yoso* = 'plain'; *ndua* = 'vegetable', 'arrow', 'huajes') and translates as 'Plain of Vegetables/arrows'. Yosondua covers a total area of 216 square kilometers and is limited by the municipalities of Zapotitlán del Río to the south-east and south; by San Andrés Cabecera Nueva to the south, south-west, and west; by Santa Lucía Monteverde to the west, and north-west; by San Miguel el Grande to the north-west; by Chalcatongo to the north-west and north; by Santo Domingo Ixcatlán to the north; by Santa Cruz Tacahua to the north and north-east; by San Francisco Cahacua to the north-east, east, and south-east; and finally by Santa María Yolotepec to the east.

Both municipalities are situated within a mountainous region of mainly calcareous soil types. Chalcatongo lies at an average altitude of 1,760 m.a.s.l. Yosondua is situated at 1,780 meters. Large vegetation includes several types of pine forests, red and black oak trees, and juniper tree. Topsoil erosion in advanced stages is observed in several areas of both communities. Given the altitude, the climate tends to display significant shift from temperate to cold. Mean annual temperatures are about 16-17° centigrade, but during the winter period temperature may fall well below freezing, whilst in the warmest period temperatures can rise up to 37º centigrade. Precipitation is mostly sudden and severe, and limited to the summer months.

3.1 Dominant theories in analyzing the Southern Mixteca Alta

Archaeological analysis in the Mixteca Alta focuses on the development and change of political complexity and the emergence of the *cacicazgo* system of socio-political organization at some point during the Postclassic period (AD 900-1521). This still poorly understood system, brought with it a reorientation of at least the monumental architectural complexes and possibly also the residential patterns. In addition, a set of stylistically similar valuables developed in the Mixteca. This Mixteca Puebla Style has been studied through the different media it was prominently displayed on including ceramics, pictorial manuscripts based on deer hides, jewelry, wall paintings among others (cf. Hernandez Sanchez 2005). The Mixteca Puebla Style has its florescence in the later stages of the Postclassic, and often is related to the emergence of the *cacicazgo* and its respective governing elites, as a system of exchange gifts of primary importance.

Besides socio-political organization, economic trade has also received attention by archaeologists and ethnohistorians. The transition between the high and dry Alta and the lowland Costa offered the possibility for a diverse approach to agriculture during the pre-Hispanic period, as still today. The marked shift in landscape features and flora and fauna is formed by sharp ridges completed by small rivers running to the south from the northern Alta to the Río Putla and the Río Verde in the Costa area (Spores 1967). This diversity is considered an integral part of the Mixtec economic system (Monaghan 1994). Monaghan referred to this system of product circulation between the different climatic zones as 'vertical integration'. These goods, such as corn, beans, tropical plants, cotton and cacao, were redistributed through the cacicazgos under the mediating role of the elite.

Within the spectrum of these Mixtec sociopolitical entities during the Late Classic (AD 600-900) and Postclassic period (AD 900-1500), Chalcatongo is ascribed an important ideological role in Late Postclassic manuscripts as well as early colonial documents. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez identified a pictographic reference mentioned in several pictorial manuscripts as being Chalcatongo (Jansen 1982; Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2009). Especially the information found in the codices Bodley/Ñuu Tnoo and Selden/Añute permit the identification of this 'Place of Death' as Chalcatongo. In contemporary Mixtec known as *Ñuu Ndeya* ('Place of Abundance'), which is a derivative of *Ñuu Ndaya* ('Place of Death'), Chalcatongo has thereby been signaled as the most southern cacicazgo of the Mixteca Alta.[8] Present knowledge of monumental structures and their relation to the ideological importance of the Chalcatongo peer polities is limited (but see Jiménez Osorio and Posselt Santoyo 2015).

4 The settlement pattern in the study area

The survey conducted in the Chalcatongo and Yosondua Valleys was executed in an area totaling 620 ha and recorded eight sites, all but one monumental centers with a rich spectrum of structures including raised platforms, mound-plaza configurations, stairs and sporadic evidence for sculpted iconography. The opportunistic survey method was based on indications by cognizant residents and included field walking across encountered sites, estimating their perimeter and documenting surface features and artifact scatters. All activities formed part of the ongoing state-wide

archaeological registration project conducted by the Centro INAH-Oaxaca. Included in the survey were the piedmont and hilltop areas in the valley. The valley floor itself was not surveyed. Conditions on the ground prevented yielding a representative result for this area due to intensive agricultural practices and the space taken up by the presumed lake area. Vegetation and ground cover consisted primarily of pine trees, as well as oaks at the lower levels. Animal grazing, plowing, logging, or erosion frequently exposed artifacts in these piedmont and hilltop areas.

The structures recorded during the survey can broadly be classed as Primary Monumental Centers and Secondary Monumental Centers. Additional features encountered include caves (accessible and inaccessible) and artifact scatters.[9] Isolated residential structures were sighted on the line terracing below most hilltop monumental centers, but the advanced stages of slope erosion prevented any detailed recording. In all cases, these residential structures were identified based on the partial preservation of wall foundations visible on the surface.

The Secondary Monumental Centers are significantly smaller in size and architecturally less complex than the Primary Monumental Centers. They minimally feature one non-domestic structure, but typically will be characterized by three to five examples of such public ceremonial structures, mostly rectangular platforms of different height and volume, arranged along the sides of an open plaza of rectangular shape or one that conforms to the overall shape and slope of the topography. This is what will be referred to as a group. No ball courts were recorded at any of the Secondary Centers.

The Primary Monumental Centers demonstrate greater architectural complexity and exceed the Secondary Centers in average number of hectares. All but two of these Primary Centers are located in the Chalcatongo Valley, with one located just north of Yosondua and one south of Yosonotu. The architectural complexity is not so much expressed through the elaborate nature of individual structures as through their total number and relative morphological differences at any given site. Looting and erosion have also here prevented the preservation of almost all specific characteristics that a structure may have possessed. Primary Centers are further marked by the presence of more than one independent group. The groups may or may not be joined together through walkways or line terracing running along the upper slopes of the hilltop.

The Secondary Monumental Centers recorded consisted of Yucu Tahñu, Yucu Ñaña, and Cerro del Fortín. All these three sites are comparatively small in size, ranging between no more than 1.0 to 2.3 ha in area. They are heavily looted and demonstrate a single component Classic period (AD 300-900) occupation. Pottery diagnostics, such as extensive amounts of Nochixtlan Cream Wares were identified locally. The site location in the natural landscape tends to differ from one of the less elevated hilltops in the southeastern end of the Chalcatongo Valley in the case of Yucu Tahñu to the highest local summits in the valley. Yucu Tahñu (2550 m.a.s.l.) features one group with an architectural alignment typical for the region of a plaza delimited by three low elongated and narrow platforms and one principal structure exceeding the others in volume and height (fig 2). Yucu Ñaña is a small center 2.1 ha in area located on a promontory (2440 m.a.s.l.) with dominating views in all directions. It features one group of mounds consisting of a 20 by 15 meter platform with three height levels. On the highest platform level two mounds are located on the northwestern and southwestern sides (fig. 3). This group is delimited to the southeast by a large open plaza, measuring 100 meters on a side. Cerro del Fortín consists of two mounds and two plazas, thereby adhering to the single group form, and at the same time demonstrating the internal architectural variations possible within those groups. The group consists of two mounds situated next to a quadrangular platform. This Secondary Centers showed a relationship to two water sources in the direct vicinity reinforcing the hypothesis of ritual practices related to water at these small ceremonial centers.

The Primary Monumental Centers include four sites, two if which in the Chalcatongo Valley, one in the Yosondua area, and a final near the boundary of the Monte Verde and Santa Catarina Yosonotu municipalities. They all vary in size, but have a significantly larger total surface area than the Secondary Centers. Individual structures are greater in volume and size (including examples of up to seven meters high), and also display more elaborate variability in shape. On three occasions, more than one individual architectural group is present, sometimes separated by a considerable distance. Two Primary Centers, Yucu Uncuu and Yucu Chayuu, are situated in close proximity to each other in the Chalcatongo Valley, and one, Yucu Ñuu, is located in the Yosondua *agencia* of Imperio. With the exception of Yucu Ñuu, these centers all occupy hilltop locations following the existing unevenness on slopes and purposefully containing the sediment for even ground surfaces. This natural landscape unevenness is incorporated in the site lay-out through platforms or esplanades, and in some cases, for example at Yucu Ñuu, these esplanades serve as delimiters to a plaza. Dating the occupation of these sites was based on observing surface artifacts, consisting primarily of ceramics, complemented by lithic material. While a large majority of the ceramic material consisted of monochrome utilitarian wares, Gray Wares and Fine Cream Wares were also abundantly present, the latter indicating a Classic period occupation for these Primary Centers (Geurds and Caretta,

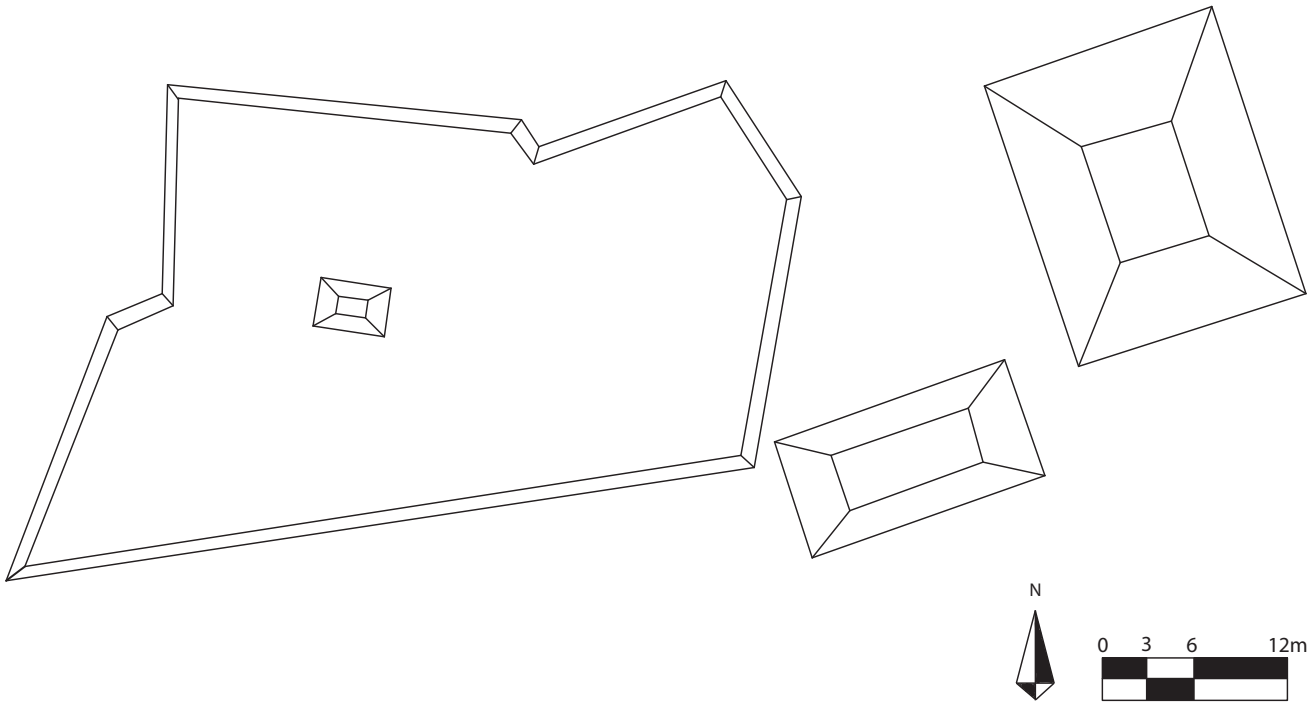


Figure 2 Plaza 1 at Yucu Tahñu, Chalcatongo Valley

1998; Winter, personal communication). The architecture and site location is consistent with this finding. Lithic materials consist of ground stone objects, such as hand axes, corn grinders ('manos'), mortars, and grinding stones ('metates'). The encountered obsidian was visually determined to be exclusively of the Otumba and Cerro de las Navajas (green gilded) types, as well as the clouded gray type (Pico de Orizaba).

Yucu Uncuu, located on the summit of Cerro Iturbide (2500 m.a.s.l.) and Yucu Chayuu both are architecturally defined by a central plaza featuring three or four platform structures along the sides. Yucu Uncuu, situated to the southwest of Chalcatongo within the terrain of the agencias of Progreso and Iturbide, shows two groups of structures (fig. 4). These were constructed with worked stone of various sizes. The smaller blocks were used in the central parts of the walls, and the larger blocks served as façade or retainers near or at the corners. Some blocks displayed a size of up to 75 cm, however, many of these had been removed, possibly, to serve in the construction of houses. In similar fashion, many of the smaller blocks have been removed to serve as stone field boundaries, or *tecorrales*. At the eastern side of one the principal mound structures a petroglyph is visible on one of the upper stones (fig. 5). For this part of the structure,

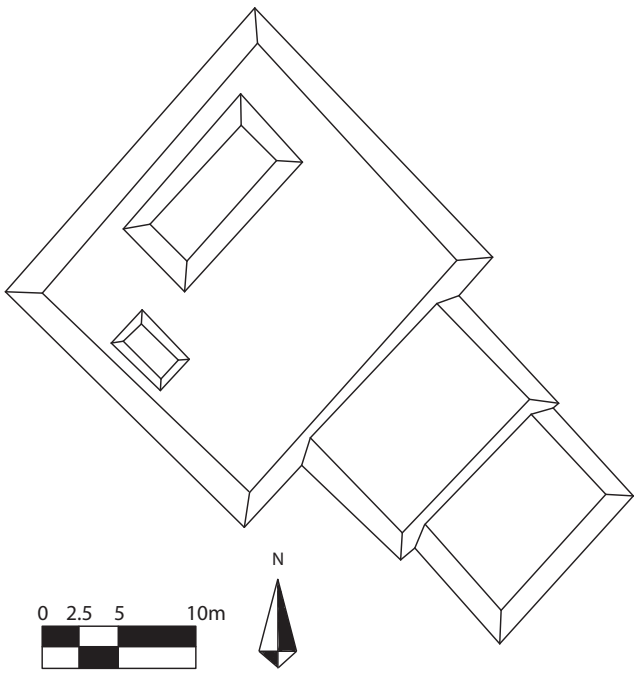


Figure 3 Yucu Ñaña, Santiago Yosondua

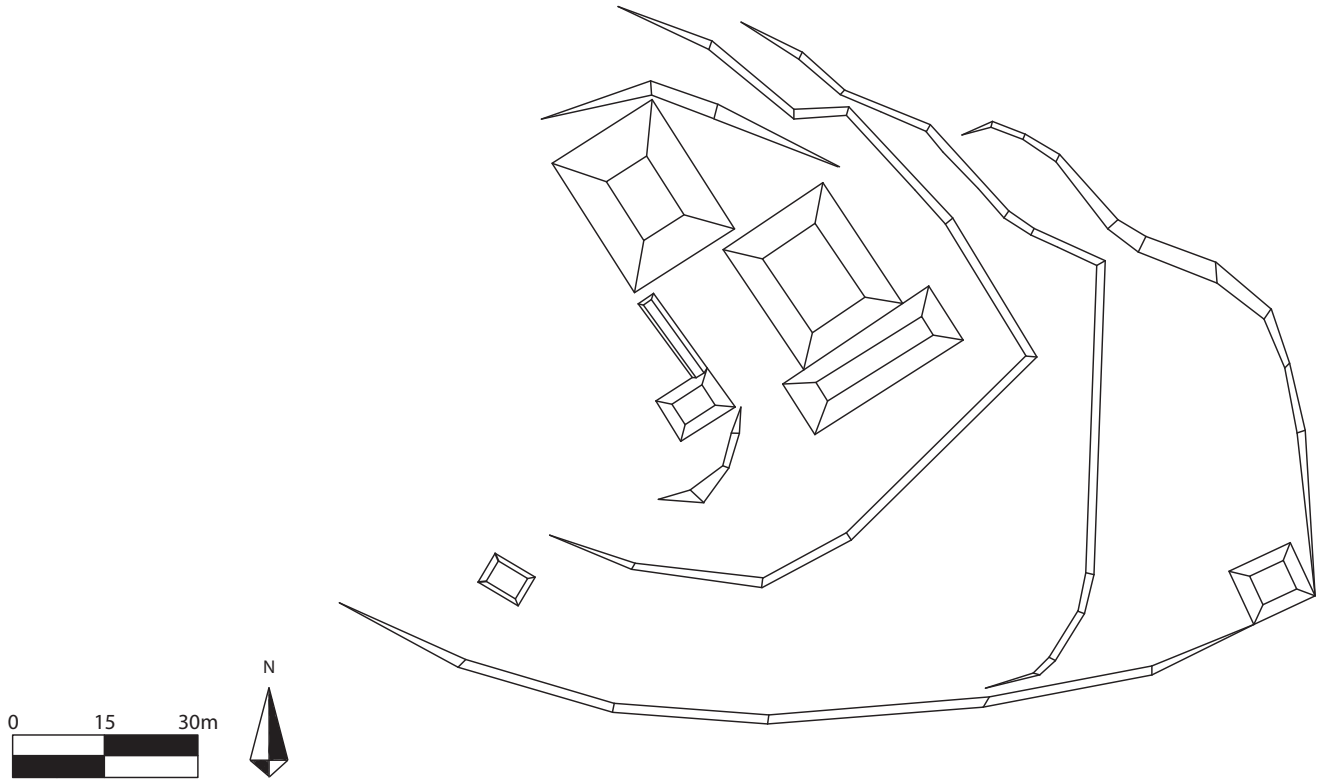


Figure 4 Yucu Uncuu, Chalcatongo Valley



Figure 5 Cornerstone petroglyph at Yucu Uncuu. Possibly a rendering of the calendar sign for Movement

as well as many others, architectural analysis was hampered by the numerous looting pits situated in their immediate proximity. Walls that had collapsed, or were at the point of collapsing, were seen on numerous occasions.[10]

The highest architectural diversity of all Primary centers is displayed by Yucu Chayuu. This site consists of eleven mounds, five plazas, one internal patio, and one sunken patio, of which most are rectangular in shape and differ in dimensions (fig. 6). The mounds have an average height of 2 to 5 meters. The material used for construction includes both calcareous and extrusive igneous rock. Yucu Chayuu, situated approximately 2 kilometers north of Chalcatongo (2550 m.a.s.l.), on the summit of the hill with the same name (also referred to as Cerro de Chapultepec), follows the hilltop shape in its form featuring a north-south axis of 350 meters and an east-west axis of 150 meters. Exceptional to this site is the construction of levelled surfaces on this fairly narrow hilltop by means of massive walls that characterize the west and east lateral sides of the site. The West Wall stands out with an approximate length of 65 meters.

Whereas at Yucu Chayuu the grouping of buildings is compacted on a relatively small and narrow ridge top, the spacing at Shini Tiinduu Yucu at Santa Catarina Yosonotu is

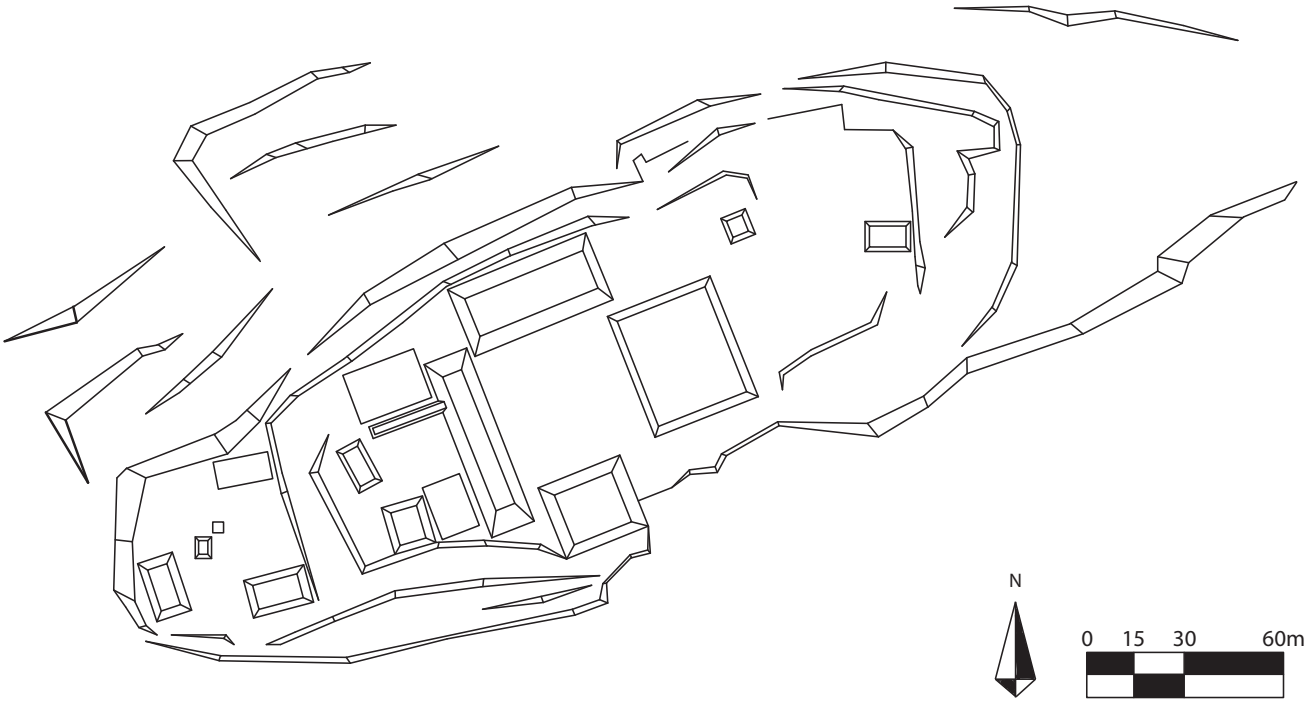


Figure 6 Yucu Chayuu, Chalcatongo Valley. Three plazas are situated at different levels in addition to several smaller mounds, at times featuring staircases. In the central part of the plaza a sunken patio was encountered

much wider. Individual structures are built on small natural peaks along a hilltop extending for approximately 500 meters (fig. 7). The location of this site along the contested municipal limits of two communities made a detailed recording process impossible at the time of the visit.

Lastly, the site of Yucu Ñuu is located on the higher parts of a hill slope (2360 m.a.s.l.) and is the only site where architecturally semi-intact tombs were recorded (fig. 8). Two types of tombs can be discerned. The first type consists of three chambers arranged in perpendicular form around a quadrangular central antechamber. The second type is made up of tombs consisting of individual chambers lacking the antechamber but with varying overall length. An extraordinary example of this is Tomb I with a horizontal length of approximately 12 meters (fig. 9).

The distribution of monumental centers is associated to the presence of sufficiently large tracts of drained flat surfaces in the immediate proximity (1 to 1.5 kilometers). In the peripheries of Yucu Uncuu, El Fortín, Yucu Chayuu and Yucu Ñuu, *lama bordo* agricultural zones are situated directly below the monumental architecture.

Monumental construction reached a peak during the Classic Period, and it is thus consistent with findings from



Figure 7 Shini Tiinduu Yucu, Santa Catarina Yosonotu. Note the wide spatial arrangement of groups

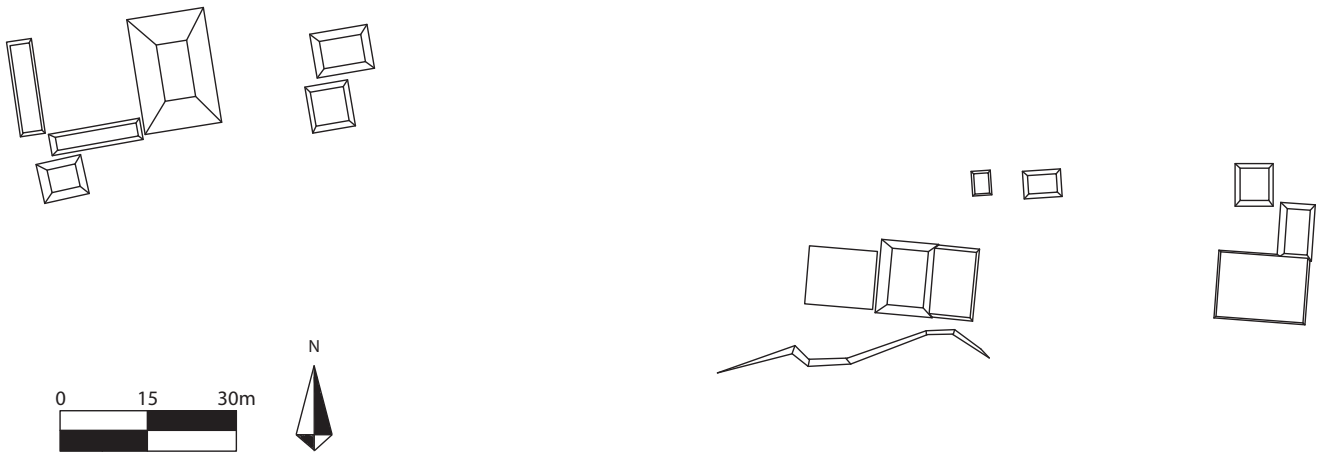


Figure 8 Yucu Ñuu, Santiago Yosondua

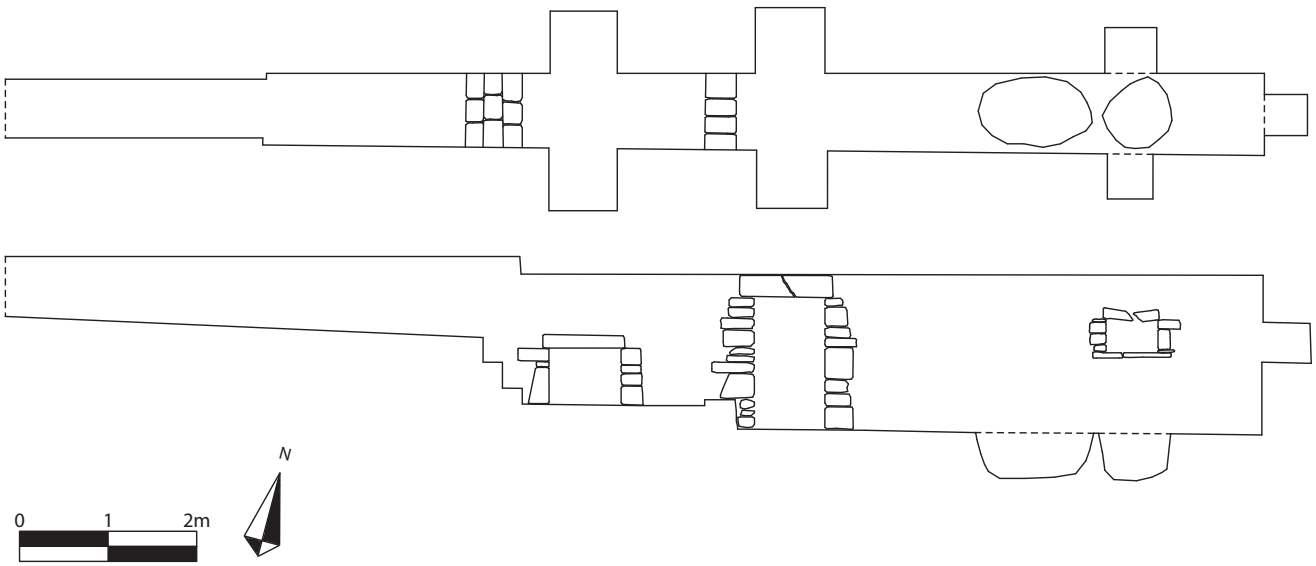


Figure 9 Tomb I at Yucu Ñuu, exceeding twelve meters in depth. Note the composition of a straight tunnel and three sections, beginning with a very small access of almost 60 cm, but acquiring a height at the back end of 1,8 meters. There are two series of large niches on each side of the walls of the tomb and three niches of minor size in the final part of the tomb. The entire construction was constructed with rectangular limestone rock without making use of some type of mortar

more northerly areas of the Mixteca Alta, to conclude that the settlement pattern in the southern Alta was also dominated by these centers. The architectural lay-out of Yucu Chayuu and Yucu Uncuu, for example, mirrors a comparably elaborate monumental form that is prominently present at for example Yucuñudavui (Spores 1984). In order to address the role of the Chalcatongo –Yosondua area in Postclassic times, illuminated by references to the Chalcatongo place name in several Late Postclassic pictorial manuscripts, more intensive surveying will most likely lead to improved insights into this period. The first indications from this survey, however, do not seem to warrant the confirmation of a major Postclassic period regional importance, as hinted at in the mentioned manuscripts. Two alternatives can be considered here: (1) The Chalcatongo place name geographically points to an area, perhaps adjacent to, but other than the present Chalcatongo Valley proper or (2), its referred to regional importance is reflected differently in the archaeological record. Ongoing work by Jiménez Osorio and Posselt Santoyo are likely to further advance this issue. Aside from this, all sites merit more consolidation and protective activities. If no action is undertaken in the near future, continuing destruction due to natural and human agents is more than likely.

5 An introduction to community social complexity

The above reflects the archaeological findings from the two field seasons undertaken in 1998 en 1999. The first season of fieldwork was undertaken in the spring and summer of 1998 and consisted primarily of the localization of the described archaeological sites in the area directly around Chalcatongo and, further to the south, around Yosondua. The second field season was complementary to the 1998 survey area and took place in the spring of 1999.

We initially visited Chalcatongo accompanied by a local resident and a representative of INAH. The first action taken was to solicit a meeting with the municipal president in order to express our interest in the local archaeological record and to stress the need to establish a preliminary overview of the sites in the area. It took several days to set up a meeting with the municipal president, who was often several times called away at the last moment to attend meetings elsewhere. At the time, I presumed it was to be expected that a municipal president of a larger community in the Mixteca Alta would indeed have many people asking for his attention. When we finally did manage to secure an appointment, the conversation was formal and rather brief. I was accompanied by an INAH official and a number of local residents were present. They voiced what seemed to me at the time a polite discourse outlining the importance of Chalcatongo and the equal importance of archaeology, to which the municipal president would reply with a similar discourse. This formal conversation took its course for about twenty minutes after which the municipal president evaluated what had been proposed to him, and consented the research. Other than granting us permission for the field activities we also received an option for lodging in the community. In later stages of the project, it became increasingly complicated to meet up with representatives of the authorities, who were rarely present at the municipal building.

During this introductory period, we had not yet had any contact with other Chalcatongo community members, other than the family who had agreed to rent out a small house at the edge of town. The first period of work, however, was now set to begin and we thus drew up our work schedule, and started out in the course of the days that followed to begin the actual survey activities. This implied early departing from the house we had rented and exiting Chalcatongo to walk the surrounding fields, taking the surrounding hills as a specific target. A community guide had been appointed to accompany us on our activities, but after a couple of days the communal responsibility he had been entrusted with had eroded to such a degree that he would only occasionally still show up. Typically, in the afternoon daily results were processed back at the house. That way, our daytime activities typically took place away from the actual community, and the nighttime activities were mostly limited to working in the house. In practice those first weeks in Chalcatongo were marked by little contact with community members, much less the establishment of close working or personal relationships.

In addition to the work schedule and its practical implications, language was another crucial element. The communication in Spanish we tried to maintain with people on the weekend or at other non-work related moments was, at the time, a considerable challenge for several members of the research team myself included, and this proved to be a major impediment for talking to people about everyday things. Effective dialogue on what we were doing in Chalcatongo was even more limited. Being confronted with this, maintaining the reciprocal relationship became a concern. Though at the outset of the project we had explicitly intended to incorporate actions to involve community members and work according to their remarks and interests, the field praxis turned out to be much more challenging. It became clear that the structure of our project was ill-fitted to reach these community-based archaeological goals.

This initial period therefore, led to the identification of these problems as part of the project structure itself. We were working on a rather tight time schedule that involved the execution of a certain number of site descriptions in a limited amount of days. Many of the activities that could have established or reinforced social relationships were not

intrinsically tied to formal archaeological fieldwork, but left to chance. This would typically involve being invited over to attend social events, and mostly also simply sitting down with people and having conversations with them. But again, this did not seem to comply with a form of community-oriented archaeology at the time. It was certainly friendly and respectful social conduct, but what we were doing out in the field during the day or processing and analyzing at night, was a topic seldom touched upon in these social events.

As can be seen in the results reported on above, the archaeological perspective we held and the goals we had set with regard to studying the local archaeological record, left little room for local involvement. Research foci such as the change in socio-political development during the Postclassic period are not a major topic of local concern and the designed field-walking campaign consumed almost all of the time in order to be completed in time. This effectively already assured the communicative disconnect that became noticeable as the project evolved.

An important structural element in the project that impeded local involvement on the individual basis was the local balance of power. The municipal president, it became quickly evident after our initial arrival, was a particularly unpopular communal leader. This is not exceptional in the Mixteca Alta, a region where political divisiveness and mistrust is a chronic phenomenon in local governance. At the time, however, we were unprepared for this. If community archaeology was not to be introduced by outsiders to a community through its leadership, how should it be done otherwise? Gradually the communal political landscape became evident, where a small group of inhabitants still supported the municipal president, and a large section were at the very least abstaining their opinion about him. As it turned out, several of the people we had established contact with, were among his supporters.

At no time did anyone try to obstruct or openly criticize our presence or activities, the concerning element was rather that no one seemed to care; no discussions were held, and thus no dialogue established. One exception occurred during our stay at Yucu Ñuu. After a few days, some markers we had used for measurements had been removed. Part of the equipment stored at the site to avoid carrying additional weight to the site each day, was stolen or destroyed. In addition, the entrance to one of the tomb chambers was covered, which subsequently prevented exact registration. One of the stone slates functioning as a ceiling and as a threshold in the entrance of the west tomb chamber was damaged, causing it to collapse. Finally, a tomb was damaged by graffiti and the discarding of trash. When we informed as to who might have done this, a surrounding resident told me that at least two of the tombs were looted recently and that it appeared to him a common activity. However, he preferred not to venture too deep into the matter because most people in the area are relatives and *"pues, mejor no rajar leña"*.[11]

Meetings with the municipal authorities of Santiago Yosondua and Santa Catarina Yosonotu took on a similar character, reaching instances where it was implicitly advised not to speak to the authorities at all. In all of these cases permissions were granted and formal collaboration thereby effectively established. Though the lack of communication did not affect the objectives of the two field campaigns, it did generate a lack of fulfillment at the aspired collaborative aspect of the field research.

5.1 Project flexibility

Power issues were not restricted to the intra-community arena; there was also a discomforting power agenda between the community and us as a research team. Preset research priorities were largely guiding in assessing what was worth investigating and what should be regarded as a waste of time and energy. It seemed beyond discussion that our handling of the material past was the correct way to proceed. Paradoxically though, archaeological field research seldom adheres to the strict planning that may have been set up back at the university. More often than not, particular events or unexpected finds force the archaeologist to reschedule the time table, and this famously always occurs near the scheduled end of the field activities. Local social circumstances are equally important to involve in this time table, failure to do so was in this case-study not so much perceived as breaking a moral code, but rather as a confirmation of one's status as an outsider archaeologist who cannot be expected to, even though temporarily, form part of the community.

As outlined in the first half of this paper, the intentions for this research showed quite some similarities to the predominant ways in which archaeological research is conducted in the Mixteca Alta. Since its early days in the middle part of the twentieth century, this archaeology emphasizes the analysis of regional socio-political and economical processes of change, as well as an interest in the interregional ties to the Valley of Oaxaca and Monte Albán specifically (overviews in Joyce 2010; Pérez Rodríguez 2013). Accordingly, this work involved large regional survey projects (Balkansky *et al*. 2000; Kowalewski *et al*. 2009) combined with excavation campaigns at several of the larger sites. The relation between ecological conditions and the development of societies is primarily studied along the coastal region of the Mixteca, centering on the Río Verde basin (Joyce 2013).

With regard to these research emphases, the chosen southern region of the Mixteca Alta promised to be a fitting

addition to the existing research in the surrounding regions. However, the intentions to fulfill this research project and doing so whilst remaining in dialogue with the community of Chalcatongo and, to a lesser degree, Yosondua, could not be maintained after the two field seasons. In evaluating the fieldwork, it became clear that the goals had to be aligned according to this perspective: effective dialogue with the community would not succeed with a research agenda that did not rely on local input. Monologues, in the form of well-intended explanations of what we were doing in the community were at best respectfully acknowledged, but never challenged or discussed. These interactions did not seem to hold up any notion of exchange of information, much less true dialogue.

The two briefly described fieldwork seasons did not succeed in establishing an open dialogue with the involved communities. Such a dialogue is a first step in beginning to understand the meaning ascribed to pre-Hispanic material remains and the specific interests that inhabitants may hold in these materials and sites. Crucial herein was the lack of a critical understanding of the heterogeneous nature of these communities and the absence therefore of multivocality in how the project was to be executed. Such an understanding of communities is an element I now consider essential to any form of participatory archaeology, as I have argued elsewhere (Geurds 2007; 2011). One possible outcome such dialogue could have resulted in is an emphasis on the named localities and stories dotted around the Chalcatongo and Yosondua landscape. The incorporation of that cultural landscape memory could have led the field research to the same archaeological sites, but most likely also to other locations of cultural importance which would have gone unnoticed or yielded no archaeological deposits relevant to the research questions. Later research has amply demonstrated this for other cultural landscapes in the Mixteca Alta (*e.g.* Geurds and Jansen 2008; Gehring 2012). To allow for local participation, involving local knowledge systems with archaeological perspectives will reveal some of the different ways in which landscapes can be culturally remembered and reconstructed. This can lead to shifts in the aims of a project, thereby necessitating flexibility in the project design. This adaptability was not considered during the described fieldwork, and this ultimately contributed to the cessation of communication.

6 Conclusion

What this paper has illustrated is that participatory goals in archaeological field research can be decisively determined by social and political conditions in local communities (cf. Merriman 2004). The heterogeneity of such cultural settings is challenging to reconcile with the establishment of guidelines for practicing archaeologists. These settings range from urbanized areas where building contractors; local or supra-local governing bodies; and other local stakeholders are involved in the archaeological fieldwork, to indigenous settings like the Mixteca Alta where comparable supra-local bodies fill very different social roles and local political actors may have determining voices in the archaeological activities taking place. Stakeholders in the local material culture, based on culturally hereditary ties to these materials, undeniably is a significant influence on the archaeological praxis.

Ultimately, the fragmented political environment in Mixteca Alta communities, in tandem with the multitude of perceptions among community members, perceptions based on past conflicts and current divisions among families or intra-communal social units, leads to the paradoxical view of communities that as a dialogue partner on archaeological remains *de facto* do not exist. The fieldwork analyzed here has shown that basic elements of community archaeology may not provide the outcomes aspired by the researcher. Similar to conceptual debates surrounding the notion of a community (Cohen 1985), participatory archaeology needs to have an ethnographic awareness of local stakeholders, rather than assume outwardly displayed political structures as sufficiently representing community voices. Since this research, subsequent archaeological field projects, that aspire to involve the local surroundings of archaeological objects of study, now more critically consider the entangled social and political conditions of communities having a stake in archaeological remains (Pyburn 2011; Smith and Waterton 2009). Beyond public archaeology in the United Kingdom and NW European settings, a more global perspective is emerging, even though Latin America and certainly Mexico remain often overlooked sources for comparative cases (see for example Waterton and Watson 2011). A weighty tome of 34 chapters, the *Oxford Handbook for Public Archaeology* (Skeates *et al*. 2012) includes a single chapter on Latin America (Funari and Bezerra 2012). A recent issue of the journal *World Archaeology* (2015), dedicated to public archaeology, does not include the Americas at all.

There is a case for having a better sense of what it means to strive for a participatory archaeology in the Mixteca Alta. Considerations should at least include (1) an awareness that the project is conducted in unknown social contexts; (2) a project design that is open for ongoing negotiation through dialogue in practical aspects but also in the goals it sets for itself; (3) a presence in the community that enables recognition of the social contexts and the intra-communal balance of power, through forming partnerships that do not merely focus on archaeology; and (4) an understanding that the limits of what is attainable may lie beyond what is possible.

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Notes

1 United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues.

2 These individual experiences in the field have given rise to a prioritization for the local diffusion of archaeological information. This is reflected in both the ethical codes of conduct of the Society of American Archaeology (www.saa.org/AbouttheSociety/PrinciplesofArchaeologicalEthics/tabid/203/Default.aspx, accessed on October 15, 2016) and the World Archaeological Congress (http://worldarch.org/code-of-ethics/, accessed on October 15, 2016).

3 Historical archaeology in North America can be referred to here again as a sub-field which has seen a significant number of projects in which contemporary communities fill an important role (Orser 1996; Little 2002; Paynter 2000).

4 'En primer lugar el señor Esteban Avendaño, localizó una gran zona arqueológica que parece haber sido el Tilantongo primitivo, pues su nombre así lo indica. En efecto se llama actualmente Cerro o Monte Negro, y Tilantongo quiere decir en mexicano "el lugar negro" (Caso 1938: 55).

5 Avendaño might also feature on a group photograph taken at the Caso encampment at Monte Negro a year later (Acosta and Romero 1992: 24). This would be the person standing next to Caso and mentioned as 'persona no identificada'.

6 Archaeological research pioneered by Arthur Joyce in the 1990s in the Río Verde drainage basin on the Pacific coast of Oaxaca basin and currently co-directed with Stacy Barber has successfully established strong community ties. It's long-term presence and explicitly developed community initiatives are key to this success (www.colorado.edu/rioverdearchaeology.org, accessed on February 19, 2017).

7 I have analyzed additional reasons for this situation elsewhere (Geurds 2007).

8 Place of Death is associated with the place-glyph characterized by one or several skull(s). As for example in the Codex Bodley, where Lord 8 Deer 'Jaguar Claw' is shown in his grave besides his brother-in-law / father-in-law Lord 8 Lizard; who is seated on the place name *Ñuu Ndaya* (Jansen 1982).

9 The site of Cueva del Coyote is such a cave site of which there are many in the study area. It is situated on the eastern face of the Fortin hill, on the border of the Chalcatongo and Santa Catarina Ticua (*agencia* Paz y Union) communal terrains. The access to the site is easiest from the western face lain in the municipal lands of Chalcatongo. The overall cave dimensions are considerable: approximately 30 meters deep and 4 meters wide. There was a limited presence of ceramic material similar to the material encountered on Yucu Uncuu and Yucu Chayuu.

10 On the northern and western part of the hill are some agricultural areas. To delimit these areas, a considerable number of blocks and stones belonging to the structures are used, leading to extensive damage to the structures. Within the limits of the site area various looting pits have been registered. At the foot of the western side of a principal structure one of many looting pit was recorded. This pit emitted a cool draft; this may possibly relate to the existence of an underground connection to a cave which is situated to the south at a distance of approximately 400 meters. The entrance to this cave has collapsed.

11 It was further commented that detecting the tombs is an easy task. It was done by stepping firmly on the soil around potential area and listening to the resonance. This was not always successful, but in many cases small holes were dug next to them.

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