

The Emergence of the Zapotec State

One of the most exciting phases of Zapotec prehistory was Period II of Monte Albán. That period began by 100 BC and lasted until AD 200. During Monte Albán II there can no longer be any doubt that Oaxaca society was organized as a state, and an expansionist state at that. Virtually every archaeologically recoverable institution of Period II reflects a state level of sociopolitical organization. Those institutions (many of which have also been detected in early Old World states) will be examined in this chapter; Chapter 14 will document the way the Zapotec expanded through colonization and conquest.

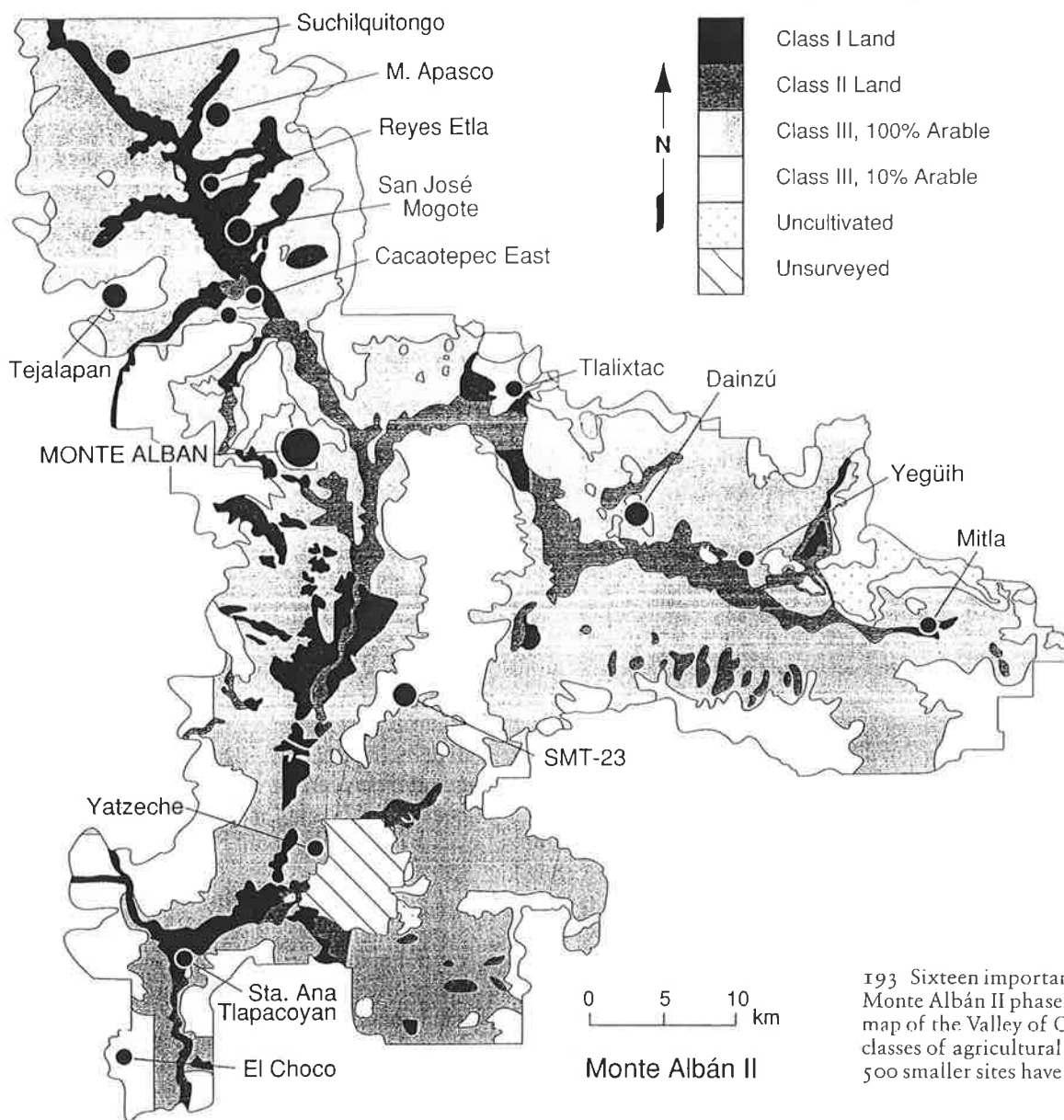
Population Estimates

The Monte Albán II state was very likely supported by a combination of dry farming, irrigation, and tribute. Maize, beans, squash, chile peppers, avocados, agaves, prickly pear, and other wild and domestic plants figured in the diet. There were now so many people in the valley that venison probably had to be restricted to the elite, but there were still plenty of rabbits, mud turtles, pocket gophers, birds, and lizards for commoners. To the domestic dog, still a major meat source, the Zapotec had now added the flesh and eggs of the turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). Where and when turkeys were first domesticated is unknown; their wild ancestors can still be found in northern Mexico and the United States.

Monte Albán II also had the most colorful and distinctive pottery seen in Oaxaca since the San José phase. Burnished gray ware remained popular, but it was joined by waxy red, red-on-orange, red-on-cream, black, and white-rimmed black vessels, many of whose shapes and colors reflect an exchange of ideas with neighboring Chiapas. The distinctiveness of this pottery makes it relatively easy to identify on the surface of the ground, and some 518 communities of this period have been identified in the Valley of Oaxaca.

That number is 227 fewer than in Monte Albán Ic, and despite the fact that Monte Albán II sites were larger on average, this decline in number of sites affects the population estimates made by the Settlement Pattern Project. Their estimates for the valley in Monte Albán Ic average 51,000; their estimates for Monte Albán II average 41,000. This decline of about 10,000 is thought to reflect the movement of Zapotecs out of the Valley of Oaxaca as part of a deliberate colonization of neighboring areas.

Many lines of evidence suggest that such a colonization was, in fact, taking place (Chapter 14). However, it should also be remembered that the pottery



193 Sixteen important settlements of the Monte Albán II phase, superimposed on a map of the Valley of Oaxaca which shows classes of agricultural land. (More than 500 smaller sites have been omitted.)

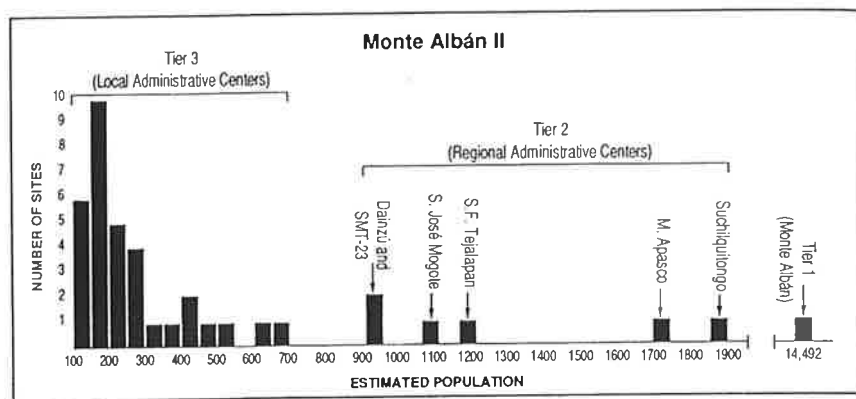
attributes chosen as diagnostic of a period can affect one's population estimates. In this case, we suspect that part of the population decline in Period II is due to the Settlement Pattern Project's very high population estimate for Period Ic.

Several attributes of the Period II settlement system indicate that the whole valley was now under the control of a single state centered at Monte Albán.

For one thing, the ring of 155 settlements that had surrounded Monte Albán during Late Period I was now gone. The central region of the Valley of Oaxaca, once densely populated, was now reduced to 23 communities. This suggests that

The Emergence of a Central Place Hierarchy

194 Histogram of the 40 largest settlements in the Valley of Oaxaca during Monte Albán II. Only Tiers 1–3 of the settlement hierarchy are thought to have had administrative functions.



Monte Albán no longer needed to concentrate farmers, warriors, and laborers within 15 km of the city, because its rulers could now count on the support of the entire valley.

In addition, there no longer seems to be any ambiguity about a four-tiered hierarchy of communities in the valley. Monte Albán, now covering 416 ha, was the only “city,” or occupant of Tier 1; its population is estimated at 14,500.

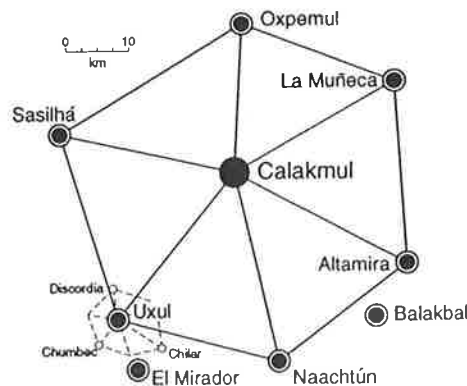
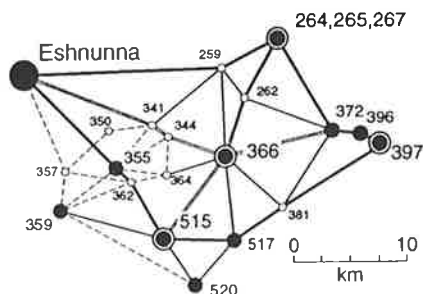
Six sites with estimated populations of 970–1950 might have been Tier 2 communities, or “towns.” All lay between 14 and 28 km of Monte Albán, less than a day’s trip. All show surface evidence of having been regional administrative centers. Even the fourth largest of these towns, San José Mogote, covered 60–70 ha.

Tier 3 of the hierarchy consisted of at least 30 “large villages” in the 5–10-ha range, with populations estimated at 200–700 persons. A number of these sites have been excavated, and show evidence of public buildings.

Finally, Tier 4 of the hierarchy consisted of more than 400 “small villages” with estimated populations below 200 people. Almost none of these sites have been excavated, and we lack evidence of administrative functions at any of them.

The strikingly regular distances between some Tier 2 towns and Monte Albán suggest that we are dealing with a “central place hierarchy.” This is a term used by cultural geographers for an administrative hierarchy so well integrated that towns encircle the capital city at very regular distances; in turn, large villages encircle towns at regular (and shorter) distances.¹ This makes the settlement

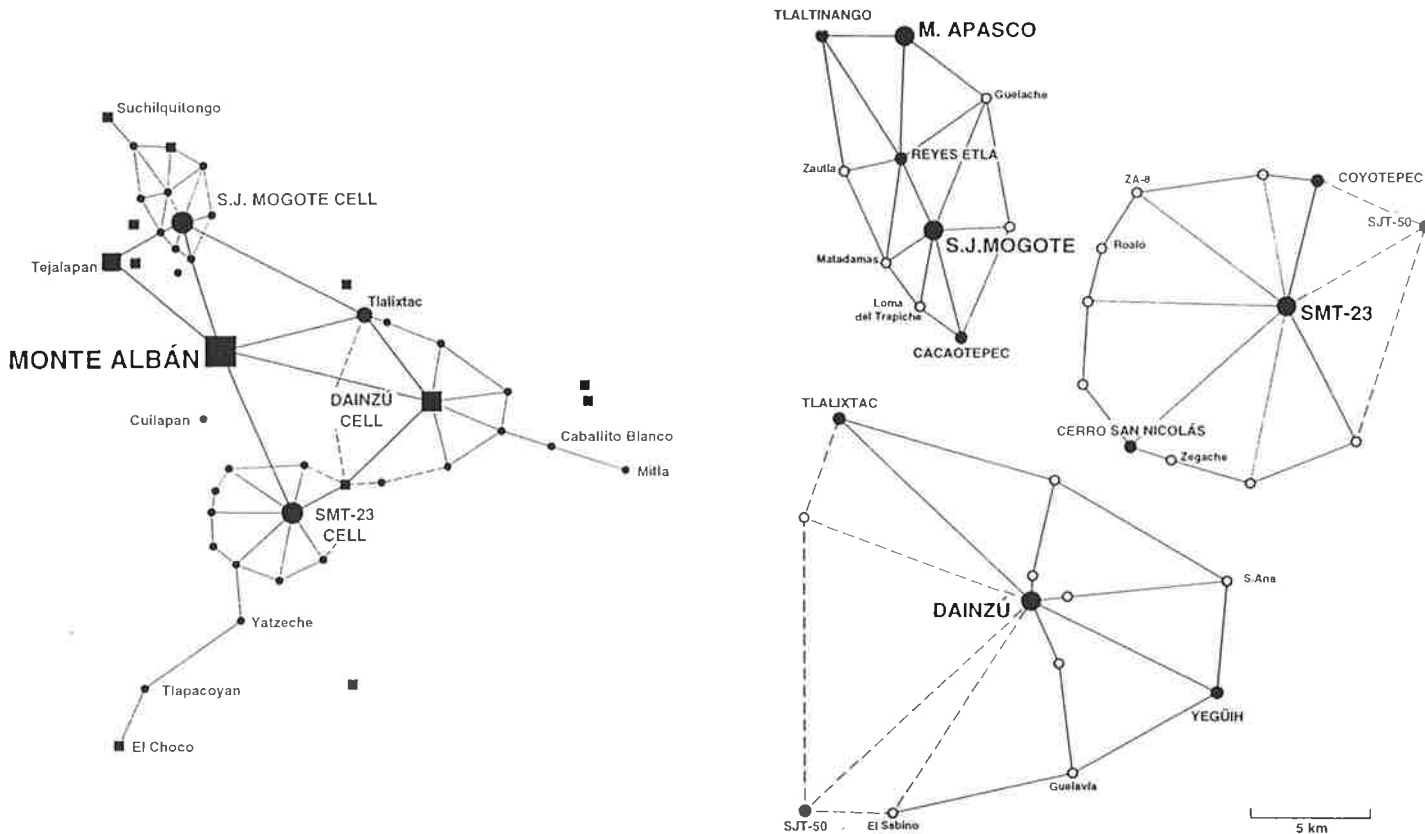
195 Examples of central place lattices from ancient civilizations. (Left) The lattice of Tier 2, Tier 3, and Tier 4 sites near the ancient Sumerian city of Eshnunna, Iraq. (Right) The lattice of Tier 2 and Tier 3 sites surrounding the ancient Maya city of Calakmul.



Opposite

196 Tentative central place lattice for the Valley of Oaxaca during Monte Albán II. Sites shown as black rectangles are in fortified or defensible settings.

197 Closeup views of the cells of large and small villages that surrounded Tier 2 centers San José Mogote, SMT-23, and Dainzú.



system resemble a lattice of nested cells, each cell representing an administrative unit. Let us now look at some of the more regular Monte Albán II cells.

Four clear Tier 2 administrative centers – San José Mogote, San Felipe Tejalapan, Dainzú, and Site SMT-23 near San Martín Tilcajete – are spaced 15–22 km from Monte Albán. A fifth community, Tlalixtác, although no larger than an average Tier 3 settlement, is in the right location to have served as another Tier 2 center. Tejalapan is in a defensible locality, and Dainzú lies at the base of a defensible hill.

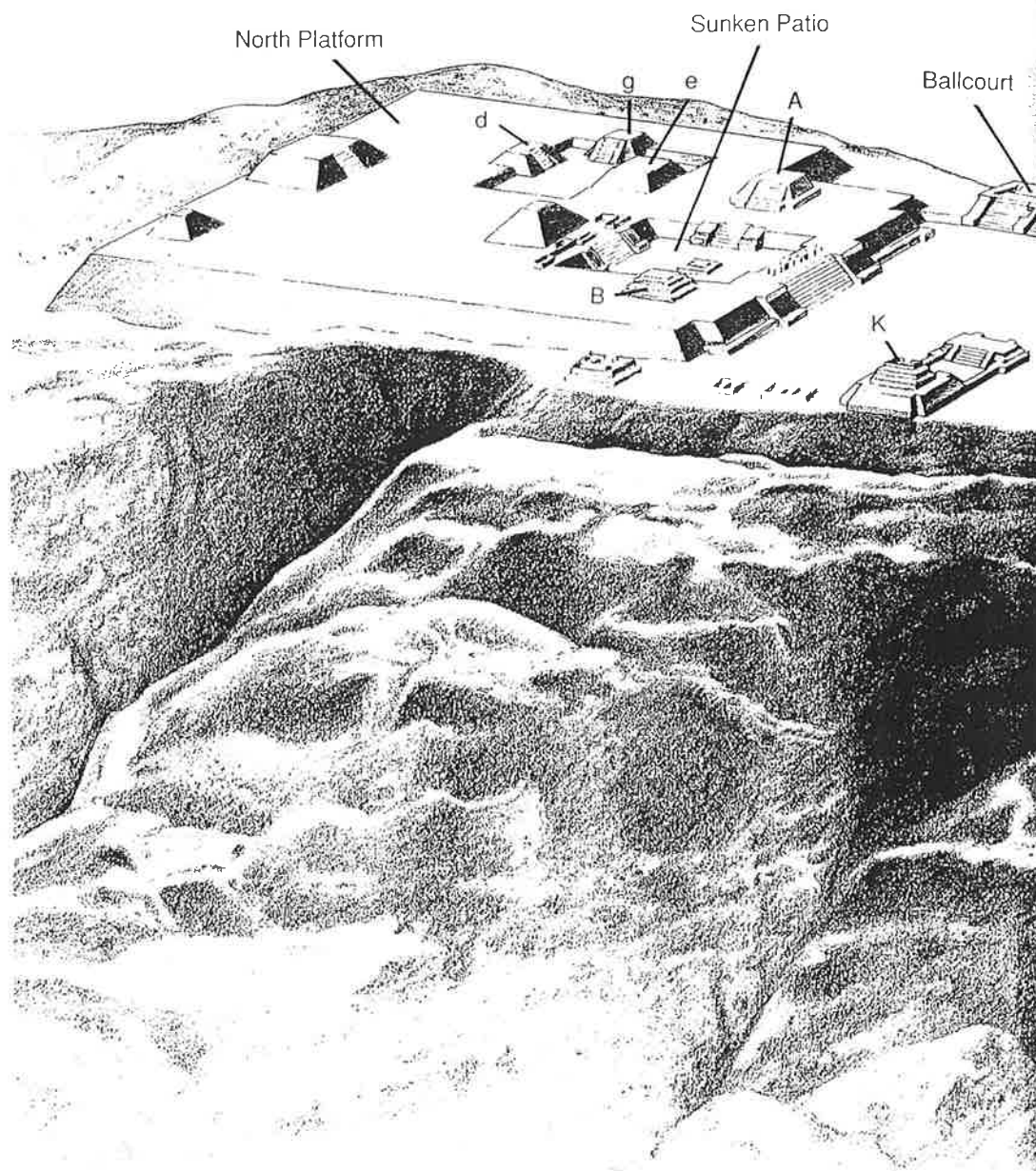
When one focuses on San José Mogote, Dainzú, and SMT-23, each appears to have an irregular cell of large and small villages surrounding it. These cells of subordinate communities suggest that San José Mogote, Dainzú, and SMT-23 were the major regional administrative centers for the Etlá, Tlacolula, and Valle Grande regions, respectively. Their dependent large villages are spaced 3–8 km from the nearest town, roughly a 1–2-hour walk.

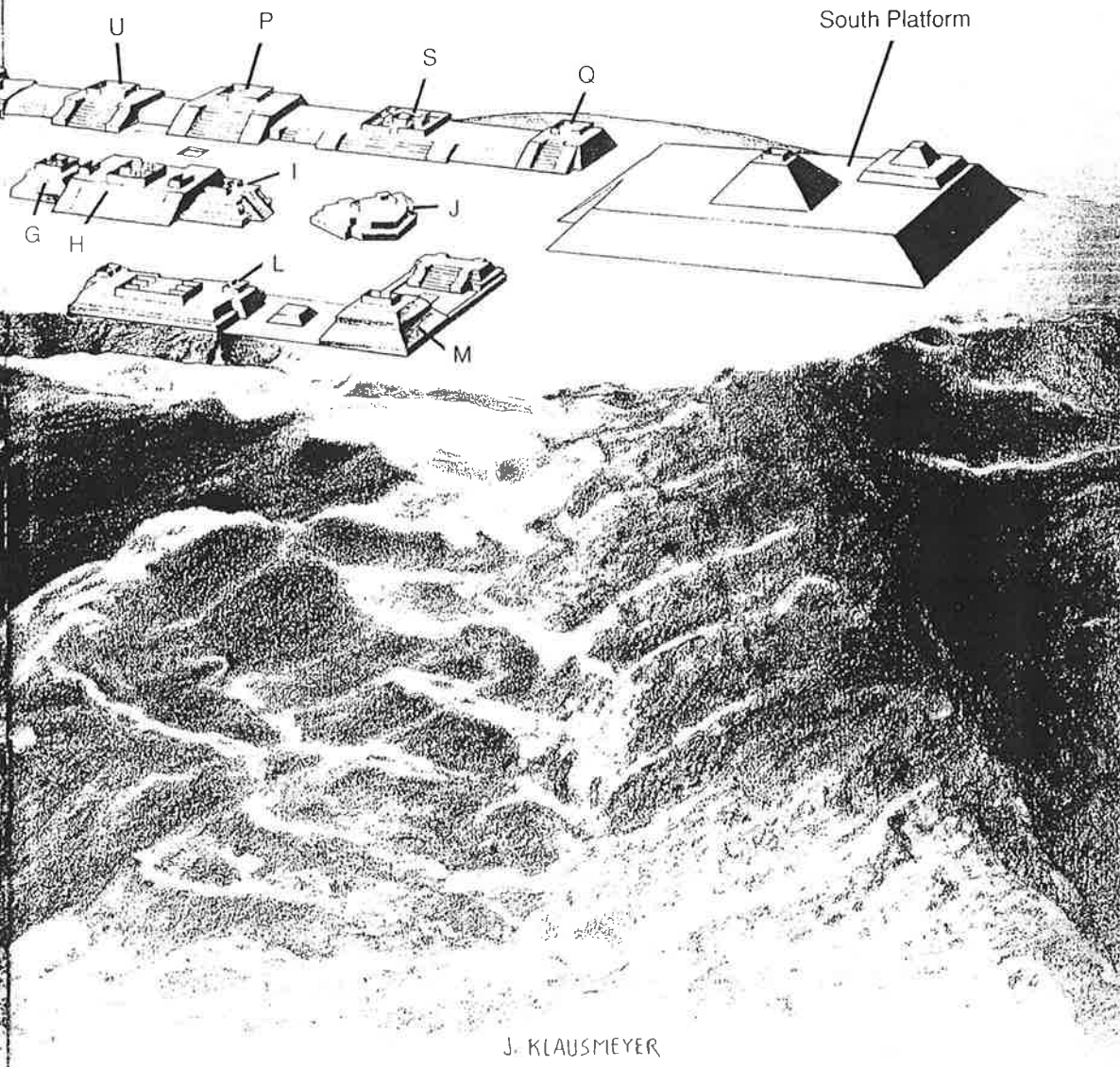
Two other settlements, classified as Tier 2 centers on the basis of size, do not seem to have been surrounded by comparable cells of large villages. Magdalena Apasco seems to have been a town in the San José Mogote cell. Suchilquitongo, a hilltop center near the upper Atoyac River, may have served to defend the northern entrance to the valley. (A smaller mountaintop center, El Choco, may have defended the pass where the Atoyac River exits the valley on its way south.)

This regular pattern of towns and large villages below the city of Monte Albán reflects a level of valley-wide integration not seen before Period II. Full



198 Huge archaeological mounds rise from a defensible hilltop near Suchilquitongo in the northern Etlá subvalley.





199 In this artist's reconstruction, Monte Alban's Main Plaza runs for 300 m between the North Platform acropolis and the South Platform pyramid. The major buildings were assigned letters of the alphabet by Alfonso Caso.

understanding of the regional system, however, will require excavation at every tier of the hierarchy. Sheer size is not always a reflection of a site's political importance, and estimates of population from surface remains are tentative.

The Archaeological Ground Plans of Zapotec State Institutions

Many of the institutions of the state are associated with a specific type of public building. Often the ground plan of that building can be recognized in the archaeological record, as can certain types of artifacts associated with the institution. We will now look at a series of buildings from the following four Monte Albán II communities:

1. Monte Albán, the valley capital, our only site in Tier 1.
2. San José Mogote, regional center for the Etla subvalley, a Tier 2 site.
3. Dainzú, regional center for the Tlacolula subvalley, a Tier 2 site.
4. Cuilapan in the Valle Grande, a possible Tier 3 center.

The "Grand Plaza" Design

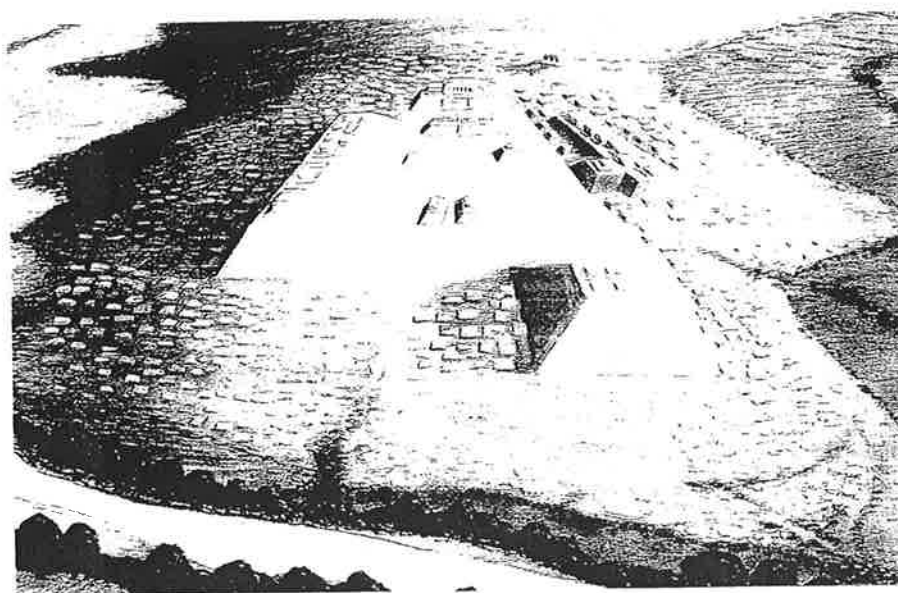
Monte Albán II saw an enormous increase in types and numbers of public structures. Without doubt, future excavations at Monte Albán will add to our meagre roster of Period I buildings, many of which lie hidden beneath tons of later construction. Even knowing this, we are awed by the explosion of public architecture in Period II.

During this era the rulers of Monte Albán leveled a huge area, 300 m north-south and 200 m east-west, paving it over with white stucco to create the city's Main Plaza. In places where natural outcrops of bedrock were too high to be leveled, the latter served as nuclei for major buildings. One north-south line of structures provided the eastern border of the plaza, another line provided the western border, and a third line covered a series of outcrops in the center of the plaza.

The northern limits of the plaza were set by the North Platform, a huge acropolis 250 m on a side, which swallowed up several Period I buildings and went on to be enlarged and modified by later rulers. We do not know what the southern limits of the plaza looked like at this time, since any Period II constructions are now buried beneath the South Platform, an enormous structure which in later times reached 150 m on a side.

This "grand plaza" design was not limited to Monte Albán; at least a few towns in Tier 2 of the hierarchy had plazas laid out in imitation of the one at the capital. Perhaps the best known of these was San José Mogote, which after many centuries of relative abandonment had undergone a major renaissance in Monte Albán II.

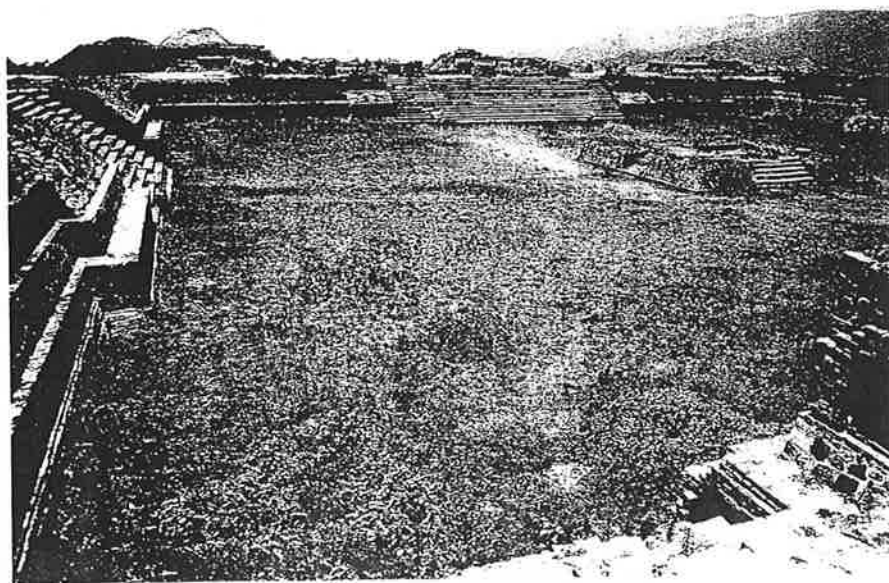
Born anew as the leading Tier 2 center in the Etla subvalley, San José Mogote was given a Main Plaza 300 m north-south and 200 m east-west, very like Monte Albán's. Similarities in layout between the two plazas are remarkable. Mound 8 of San José Mogote, which forms the northern limit of the plaza, seems to have



200 Artist's reconstruction of San José Mogote during Monte Albán II. In the foreground is Mound 1, a modified hill equivalent to the South Platform at Monte Albán. At the far end of the Main Plaza is Mound 8, a smaller version of Monte Albán's North Platform. The Atoyac River delimits the site on the south.

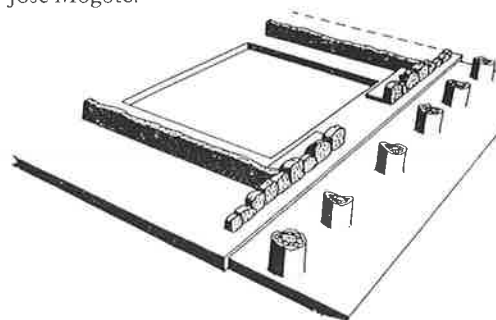
corresponded to Monte Albán's North Platform. Each supported a governmental structure reached by climbing a large stairway and passing through a colonnaded portico; Monte Albán's portico had a double row of six columns, San José Mogote's a single row of six. Monte Albán's governmental structure had a sunken patio 50 m across and 4 m deep; San José Mogote's had a sunken patio 20 m across and shallower. Both structures appear to be places for elite assembly; each, however, had "reception rooms" behind its sunken patio.

To continue the comparison of Monte Albán and San José Mogote, we see that both sites had two-room temples along both sides of the plaza, as well as on natural rises within it. San José Mogote had at least ten such temples in Period



201 (Left) The sunken patio of Monte Albán's North Platform, seen from its northeast corner.

202 (Below) Colonnaded entranceway and sunken patio atop Mound 8 of San José Mogote.





203 One temple on Mound 1 at San José Mogote could be reached by this secret subterranean stairway, originally roofed with stone slabs.

II; Monte Albán may have had twice that many. The vast majority of these temples face east or west. In perhaps five cases at San José Mogote (and at least that many at Monte Albán), pairs of temples face each other along the east–west path of the sun.

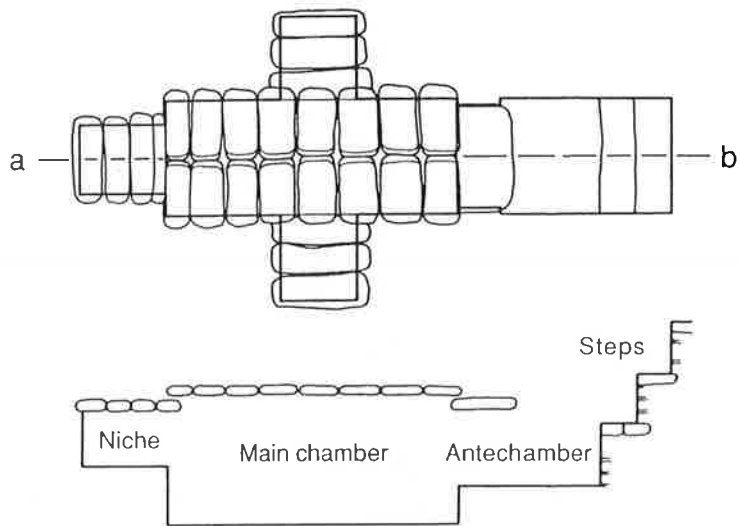
As discussed below, some temples at both sites had important offerings beneath their floors. Moreover, a few temples could be reached by secret passageways reminiscent of those seen earlier at Monte Negro. In the case of Monte Albán, there is a tunnel under the eastern half of the Main Plaza that would allow priests to move between buildings without being seen. In the case of San José Mogote there is a subterranean stairway that ascends Mound 1, the temple-crowned promontory at the south end of the Main Plaza, which corresponds to Monte Albán's South Platform.

Finally, the plazas at both Monte Albán and San José Mogote had ballcourts built in the shape of a Roman numeral I. San José Mogote never had more than one of these courts; Monte Albán eventually came to have seven scattered through the city, but many of those were built in later periods.

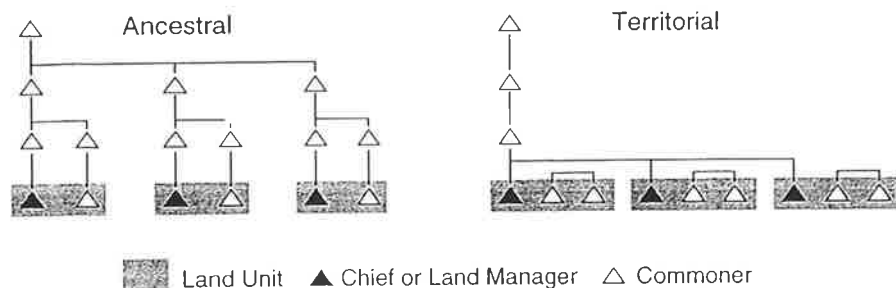
Palaces and Tombs

Many nobles of this period lived in large palaces, built of adobe brick and lime plaster over a stone masonry foundation. One of our greatest needs is for more complete ground plans of these buildings, such as the one just off the southwest corner of Monte Albán's North Platform. One such residence, built on Mound 9 in the Main Plaza at San José Mogote, was partially excavated by Robert and Judith Zeitlin. Consisting of multiple patios surrounded by 3–4 rooms, it seems to have been modified continuously during its occupation. Many of those modifications involved the dividing up of pre-existing rooms and patios into smaller spaces, possibly in response to an increase in occupants.

The tombs of Zapotec nobles became much more impressive during Period II, suggesting that the simple rectangular tombs of earlier times were no longer elaborate enough for the emergent ruling class. Now tombs might have a vaulted



204 Plan and cross-section of Tomb 118 at Monte Albán.



205 Patrick Kirch's model for the shift from rank society to stratified society in Hawaii. Under the old "ancestral" system, even low-ranking families were still genealogically connected to the chief and his high-ranking close relatives. Under the new "territorial" system, the lowest-ranking families were divorced from the genealogy and became a separate stratum of commoners.

roof, a cruciform plan including several chambers and offering niches, and a doorway reached by descending stairs. It appears that tombs might be reopened on many occasions, as various members of a noble family died and were added to them.

Tomb 118 at Monte Albán was typical. The main chamber, 3.5 m long and 1.6 m high, was extended on the left, right, and rear by 1-m-long niches half the height of the chamber itself. The antechamber was reached by descending a steep, 2-m stairway.² We suspect that the monumentality of some Monte Albán II tombs – as well as the growing gulf between them and the graves of ordinary people – signals the rise of a stratified society like that of the sixteenth-century Zapotec (Chapter 1).

In most chiefdoms, there is a continuum of differences in rank from top to bottom. People are ranked in terms of their genealogical distance from the paramount chief, with the lowliest persons being very distantly related indeed. In most archaic states, there was an actual genealogical gap between the stratum of nobles and the stratum of commoners. Lesser nobles knew they were at least distantly related to the king. Commoners were not considered related to him at all. As we have seen, the two strata were kept separate by class endogamy, the practice of marrying within one's class.

There are many possible scenarios for the evolution of stratified society out of chiefly society. An actor-centered explanation might begin with a chief's need to ensure that his offspring would succeed him. The only way he could ensure that goal was by marrying the highest-ranking woman available. The genealogical gap mentioned above could arise through intense competition for the most advantageous marriages. Eventually the more genealogically distant members of society – marriage to whom would only condemn one's offspring to lower rank – might have their kin ties to the elite severed. This apparently happened to low-ranking families in Hawaii just prior to state formation.³

Let us hasten to add, however, that the presence of a state cannot be shown simply from elegant tombs. Chiefs also received elegant burials, like that given to Tattooed Serpent, the great chief of the Natchez Indians.⁴ It takes *multiple lines of evidence* – central place hierarchies, urbanism, royal palaces, full-time priests, permanent occupation of conquered territories, and more – to make the case for statehood.

The Colonnaded Two-Room Temple

In Chapter 12 we raised the question of exactly when a second room was added to the Zapotec temple, converting it from a generalized religious structure to the

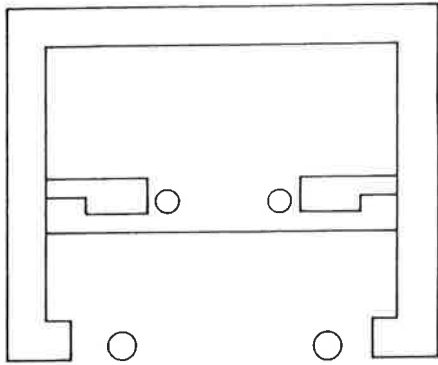
yohopèe described in sixteenth-century Spanish accounts. This modification, clearly present in Monte Albán II, is significant because it was likely done to accommodate full-time priests who lived in the inner room of the temple.

Such temples fit our sixteenth-century descriptions of the standardized structures of Zapotec state religion. They were built, essentially to the same plan, at every level of the settlement hierarchy down to and including Tier 3.

Full-time priests took a great deal of ritual out of the hands of Zapotec laymen. Men who could have sacrificed their own animals at 1000 BC now had to bring those animals to the less sacred outer room of the temple and hand them to a priest, who would perform the sacrifice in the more sacred inner room. While high priests or *uija-tào* are said to have had comfortable residences, and came and went as they saw fit, the *bigaña* or minor priests are described as “never leaving the temple.”⁵

One of the best-known temples of this type was found by Alfonso Caso in 1935 on Building X, just northeast of the Main Plaza at Monte Albán.⁶ Built atop a platform, with a stairway on the south side, the temple measured 10 × 8 m. The doorway to the outer room was 4 m wide and flanked by single columns. To reach the inner chamber, one would have to cross the outer room and step up 30 cm through a second doorway flanked by single columns. This second doorway was narrower, and the inner sanctum smaller than the outer room.

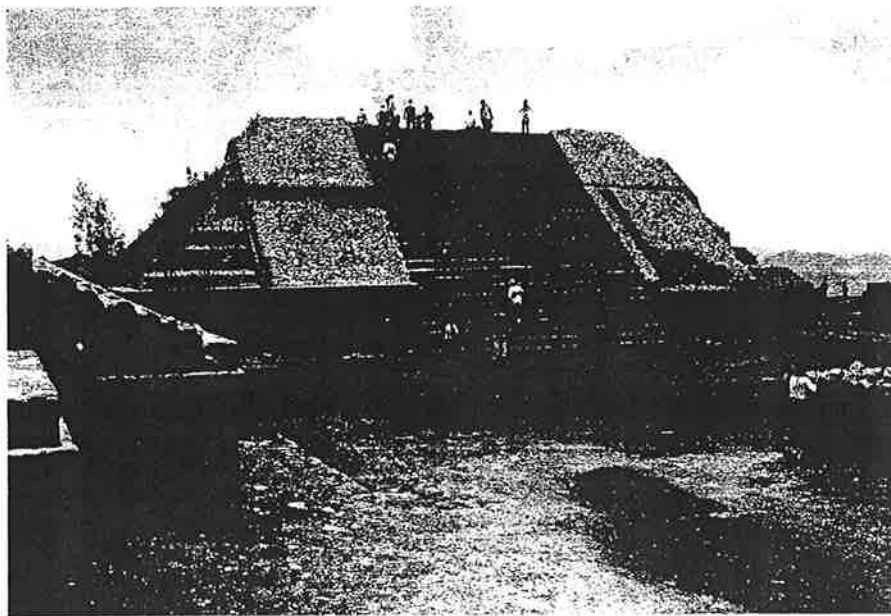
Jorge Acosta discovered a still earlier temple below the former one in 1945–46.⁷ This Monte Albán II temple is 12.8 × 11.2 m in extent; its inner room has a basin built into the stucco floor, and an offering box in the back of the room at the midline of the temple. These architectural features probably relate to the placement of offerings or incense burners, the washing of sacrificial items, or the collection of blood from sacrificed birds, dogs, infants, or prisoners.



206 (Above) Two-room temple discovered by Alfonso Caso on Building X of Monte Albán, 1935. The circles are column bases.

207 (Right) Still earlier temple on Building X of Monte Albán, discovered by Jorge Acosta in 1945–46.





208 Pyramidal platform and stairway for Temple g at Monte Albán, where two sacrificed women were buried with offerings of pottery, greenstone, and mother-of-pearl.

Rituals of Sanctification

On the basis of ethnohistoric data, we suspect that specific rulers ordered such temples to be built, and underwrote the cost of construction as an act of royal piety. It appears that before a new temple could be built it was necessary to perform what anthropologist Roy Rappaport has called a “ritual of sanctification.”^{8,9} This ritual converted secular ground to sacred ground, often requiring the burial of costly or labor-intensive offerings below the temple floor. Once that spot had been converted to sacred ground, future temples could be built above the original one.

Just northeast of the huge sunken patio on Monte Albán’s North Platform is a small patio, surrounded by three temples designated e, d, and g. A traffic-flow analysis of Monte Albán, performed by Richard Blanton, has determined this patio to be the least accessible place within the city;¹⁰ it is therefore possible that Temples e, d, and g were used exclusively by the royal family. On the mound of Temple g, Acosta recovered a Monte Albán II dedicatory cache including 6 pottery vessels, 2 necklaces of greenstone and shell, a mother-of-pearl mosaic, and 2 skeletons of women who may have been sacrificed.¹¹

At a depth of 9.5 m inside Building I – the platform for a more public temple in the center of Monte Albán’s Main Plaza – was a Period II “offering box” typical of Zapotec temples. Inside this stone masonry box was a necklace of marine shell, flower-shaped jade ornaments, two mosaic masks (one of jade and turquoise, the other of iron pyrite and shell), and a carved bone.¹²

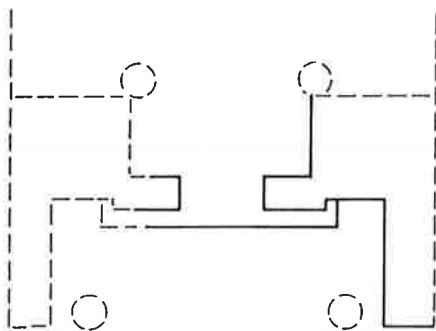
One of the most spectacular offerings of Period II, however, came not from a temple but from an “adoratory” or low ritual platform at Monte Albán. This multilevel, altar-like structure lies just to the east of Building H, near the sub-plaza tunnel mentioned above. Here Acosta discovered an important multiple sacrificial burial near the base of the adoratory.¹³ At least five skeletons, most of them young adults, had been laid on a flagstone pavement, accompanied by mul-

209 The “adoratory,” or low ritual platform, to the east of Building H at Monte Albán. The jade bat mask shown in Plate I was found here, accompanied by a multiple sacrificial burial.



multiple jade necklaces, flower-shaped jade ear ornaments, masks and pectorals of jade, pearls, conchs, and other marine shells. One skeleton wore as its pectoral an incredible mask made of 25 individual pieces of jade, fitted together to form the face of a bat, with eyes and teeth of marine shell. This mask, shown in Plate I, is considered a masterpiece of Zapotec art.

A Temple at Cuilapan



210 Plan of a two-room temple from Cuilapan, whose subfloor offerings included jade, shell, obsidian, hematite, and a sacrificed infant.

Even temples at Tier 2 and 3 communities could have important dedicatory offerings. For example, one Monte Albán II temple at Cuilapan in the Valle Grande – considered a Tier 3 center at this period – had a sacrificed child beneath its floor. The child was covered with red pigment and accompanied by 17 jade figurines, 400 jade beads, 35 marine shells, 2 pottery ear ornaments, and disintegrated mosaics of shell, obsidian, and hematite.¹⁴

“Open” Temples

Not all temples were of the two-room type; some were left open on all sides. An example is Building II of Monte Albán, described by Ignacio Bernal as “a small temple with five pillars in the front and another five in the back. . . . It never had side walls and in fact was open to the four winds.”¹⁵ On the south side of this “open” temple, excavators found the entrance to a tunnel which allowed priests to enter and leave the building unseen, crossing beneath the eastern half of the Main Plaza to a building on the plaza’s central spine.

Some clues to the possible use of such open temples are provided by a remarkable ceramic sculpture found deep in the North Platform at Monte Albán. Executed in red-on-cream pottery typical of Period II, the sculpture shows a

miniature open temple, its roof supported by columns on all sides. Inside, lurking in the shadow of the columns, is a giant macaw caught with its mouth open in mid-cry. Only half the bird's body is visible, as if emerging from some hidden entrance in the floor. One wonders if such open temples, with their secret entrances, could have been a place for spellbinding displays by priests dressed as giant birds, emerging dramatically from tunnels.

A Temple Sequence from San José Mogote

For Monte Albán II, we need not rely as heavily on ethnographic analogy to reconstruct religious rituals as we did for earlier periods. So similar were some rituals of Period II to those of the historic Zapotec that we can turn instead to the direct historical approach.

Three superimposed two-room temples from San José Mogote – Structures 36, 35, and 13 – provide us with information on rituals of sanctification, the burning of incense, the sacrifice of humans and animals, and the metamorphosis of noble ancestors into companions of Lightning. All three temples faced west, and were built of adobe brick with white-stuccoed walls and floors.¹⁶

Structure 36, the oldest temple, dated to early Monte Albán II. It measured 11 × 11 m and was slightly T-shaped, the inner room slightly smaller than the outer. Both columns flanking the inner doorway, and all four columns flanking the outer doorway, were made from the trunks of baldcypress trees (*Taxodium* sp.). So well does cypress wood preserve that identifiable fragments of it were still present in the column bases.

Structure 35, presumably built by a later ruler over the deliberately razed remains of Structure 36, dated to the middle of Period II. It was T-shaped like its predecessor and larger, measuring 12 × 13.5 m. In its columns – one to either side of the inner and outer doorways – tree trunks had now been replaced by large stones, stacked one above the other and surrounded by stony rubble plastered with lime. In the construction debris between Structures 35 and 36 we recovered the remains of quail, a bird favored by the Zapotec as an item for sacrifice.

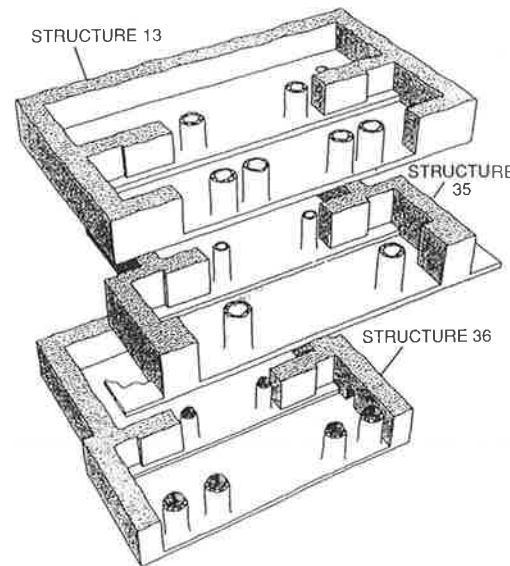
Yet another ruler had built Structure 13 above the razed remains of Structure 35. This temple, dating to late Monte Albán II, measured 15 × 8 m and was rectangular rather than T-shaped. Its columns – two flanking the inner doorway and four flanking the outer – were of stacked stones, like those of Structure 35. Its inner room had a basin set in the floor, like the temple on Mound X at Monte Albán.

The Offerings of Structure 35

Structure 35 of San José Mogote was of particular interest because its floor, as well as the artifacts left behind on it, had been preserved under a layer of soft adobe debris. The floor itself displayed sooty circles wherever incense burners had been used; particularly favored localities for burning incense were in the centers of the inner and outer rooms, along the back wall of the inner room, and atop the step between the inner and outer rooms. The columns of aromatic smoke from these censers rose until they reached venerated “Cloud Ancestors” in the Zapotec sky.



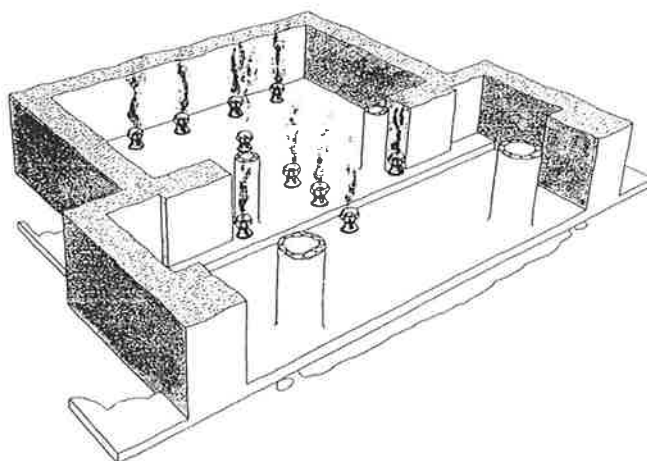
211 Ceramic sculpture of a giant macaw inside a temple, Monte Albán II. Height 49.5 cm.



212 Three superimposed Monte Albán II temples at San José Mogote.

213 Structure 35 at San José Mogote. The artist has drawn incense braziers on the ten localities most frequently used for burning incense.

214 Grotesque effigy incense brazier from San José Mogote. Height 55 cm.



In the southern part of the smoky, windowless inner room, a series of obsidian artifacts had been left on the floor. Included were two broken, leaf-shaped daggers like the one seen earlier from Monte Negro, almost certainly for the removal of human hearts. Scattered around them were 42 prismatic blades of the type used by Zapotec priests to perform ritual bloodletting, or to sacrifice small animals such as quail.

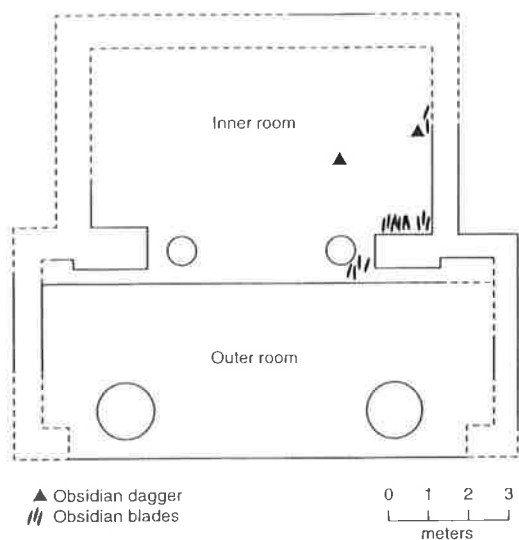
In spite of the fact that Structure 35 was built above an earlier temple, the ruler who commissioned it felt the need to place spectacular dedicatory gifts beneath the floor of the inner room. In an offering box beneath the northern half of the room lay two jade statues, two jade beads, and fragments of jade-working debris in a heap of vermillion pigment. The larger statue is 49 cm tall, standing stiffly erect with arms held rigidly at his sides. His ear lobes have been perforated for ornaments, and the top of his head has a drilled hollow which could have held the base of a perishable headdress; he may represent a sacrificed noble. The piece of jadeite on which he is carved – the largest ever legally excavated in Oaxaca! – shows the characteristic color and venation of a source near the Río Motagua, Guatemala, more than 700 km from San José Mogote (Plate XVI).

Under the south half of the same room was an offering box with seven ceramic pieces arranged in a scene. So complex is the symbolism of this scene that even a knowledge of Zapotec ethnohistory permits only the sketchiest interpretation.

The centerpiece of the scene was a miniature tomb whose walls were made of adobes set on edge, a stone slab serving as its roof. Inside this tomb was a kneeling human figure in an open bowl, flanked by the skeleton of a sacrificed quail. Immediately to the south of the tomb roof was a pair of deer antlers, trimmed as drumsticks for a turtle-shell drum.

The kneeling figure belongs to a type known in Oaxaca as “companions” because of their frequent occurrence in royal tombs. Identified as a member of the nobility by his necklace and large ear ornaments, he kneels with his arms folded across his chest in the “obeisance posture” seen in earlier figurines.

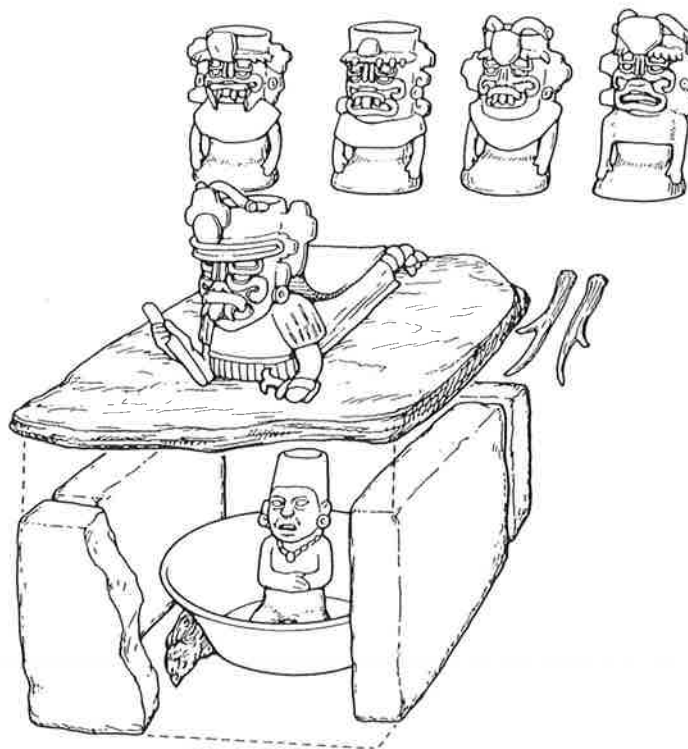
Lying full length on the roof of the miniature tomb was a “Flying Figure” with a long cape flowing behind him. He wore a mask depicting Lightning, carried a stick in his right hand, and held the bifid tongue of a serpent coiled in his left. Since the Zapotec words for “serpent” and “young maize” (*zee* or *ziy*) are



215 (Above) Plan of Structure 35 at San José Mogote, showing where obsidian artifacts had been left on the floor.

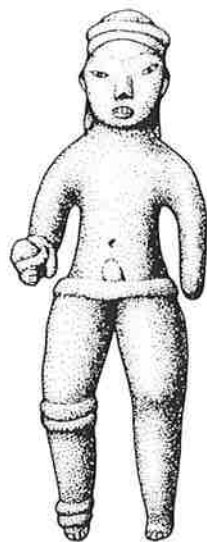
216 (Center) Broken obsidian sacrificial dagger from Structure 35, San José Mogote. Length of fragment 5 cm.

217 (Right) Broken obsidian blades from Structure 35, San José Mogote. Longest specimen, 6.8 cm.



218 (Left) Offering box below the floor of Structure 35 at San José Mogote, showing two jade statues *in situ*.

219 (Above) Beneath the floor of Structure 35 at San José Mogote was this ritual scene. It consisted of a kneeling figure and a sacrificed quail inside a miniature adobe tomb; a metamorphosed "Flying Figure" on the stone lid of the tomb; two deer antler drumsticks; and four grotesque female effigies.



220 Small pottery figurine of a ballplayer, Basin of Mexico, First millennium BC.

221 Aerial view of Complex A at Dainzú, a Tier 2 administrative center in the Tlacolula subvalley. Behind the site is a defensible hill.

homonyms, we suspect that what we see in the figure's hands are an agricultural dibble stick and a metaphor for newly sprouted maize.

Sitting in a row behind the flying figure were four ceramic effigies, each depicting a kneeling woman with a grotesque *Cociyo* mask. These women, each of whose heads was a hollow receptacle, probably represent Clouds, Rain, Hail, and Wind, the four companions of Lightning (see Chapter 1).

This scene may depict the metamorphosis of a deceased Zapotec lord into a "Cloud Person" (*ben zaa*) or "Flying Figure" who was now in contact with Lightning. He could represent a royal ancestor of the kneeling man in the miniature tomb, or even the partial metamorphosis of that same individual, caught at a stage where his body is still that of a human but his face is *Cociyo*'s.

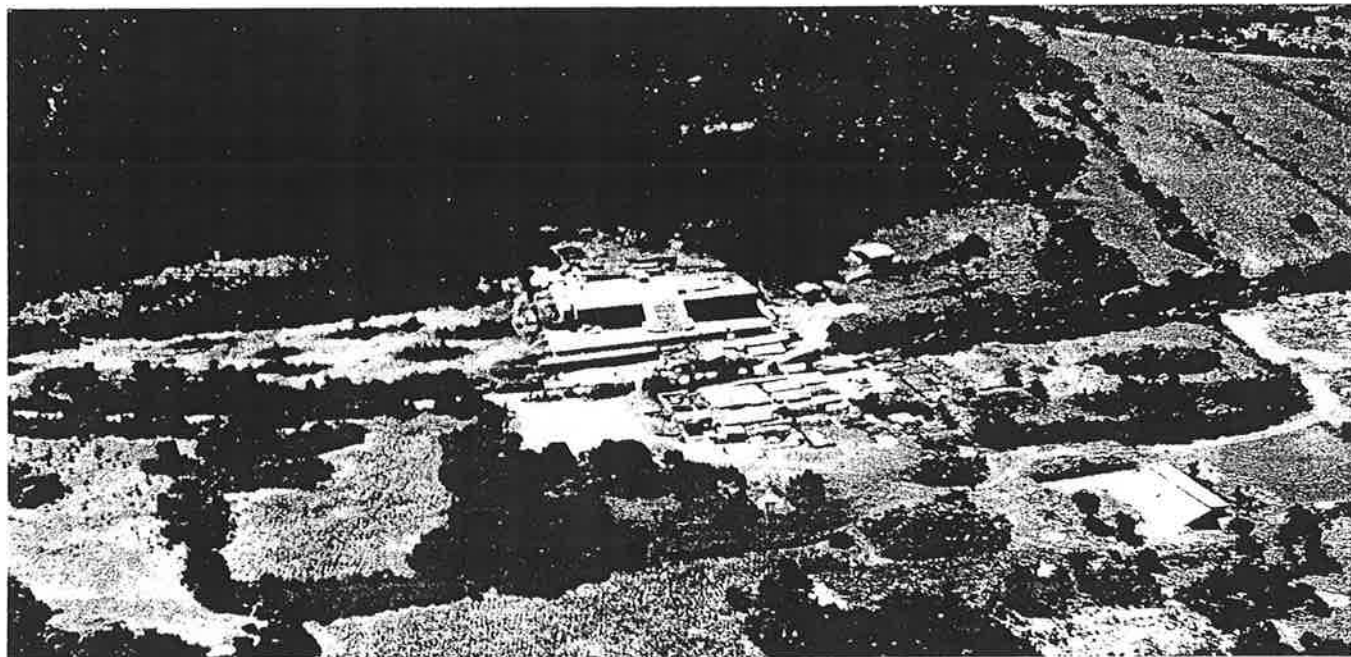
Zapotec Ballcourts

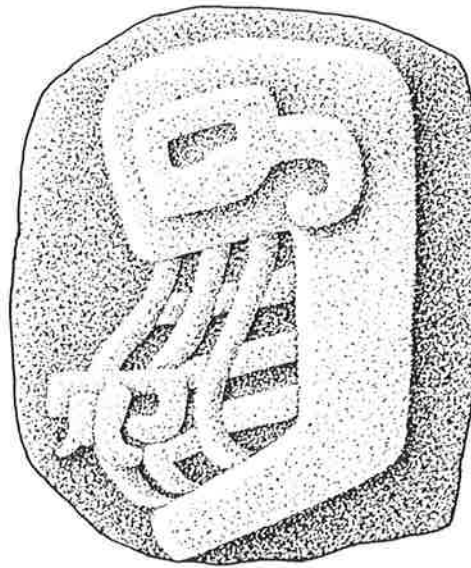
It was apparently during Monte Albán II that "state ballcourts" in the shape of a Roman numeral I first appeared. It is difficult to put these courts in historic perspective, since we have little information on the ballgame itself.

As early as 1000 BC, some small figurines made at Mesamerican villages seem to be wearing gloves, knee guards, and other equipment associated with a prehispanic ball game. This game was played with heavy balls made of latex from the indigenous rubber tree. Three such balls were preserved by waterlogging at El Manatí in southern Veracruz, a site dating to 1000–700 BC.¹⁷

Actual ballcourts of this age have not yet been identified, perhaps because they were simply rectangular open areas. The oldest ballcourts identified thus far come from the Mexican state of Chiapas and date to 700–500 BC.¹⁸

At Dainzú, a Tier 2 center in the Tlacolula subvalley, we get our first strong evidence for the Oaxaca version of the ballgame. Dainzú, with a Monte Albán





II population estimated at 1000 persons, was built along the base of a defensible hill.

Unlike San José Mogote, Dainzú has no grand plaza laid out in imitation of Monte Albán's. Its architecture does, however, share stylistic principles with the Zapotec capital. Dainzú's major governmental structure, Complex A, measures 50×30 m and was built in three stages or terraces, like Building L at Monte Albán. It also includes a roofed passageway like those at Monte Negro, and a narrow roofed stairway like the one at San José Mogote. According to excavators Ignacio Bernal and Arturo Oliveros, Complex A was begun in Monte Albán Ic and reached maximum size in Period II.^{19,20}

In the manner of Building L at Monte Albán, the lowest terrace of Complex A had many carved stones in its outer wall. These carved stones, however, do not show slain captives; more than 47 of them depict ballplayers. A typical slab shows a single player, wearing a protective mask like those worn by fencers and holding a small ball in his right hand. The figures also wear long gloves, short pants, and protective padding.

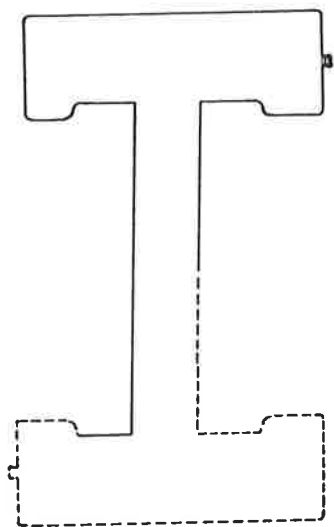
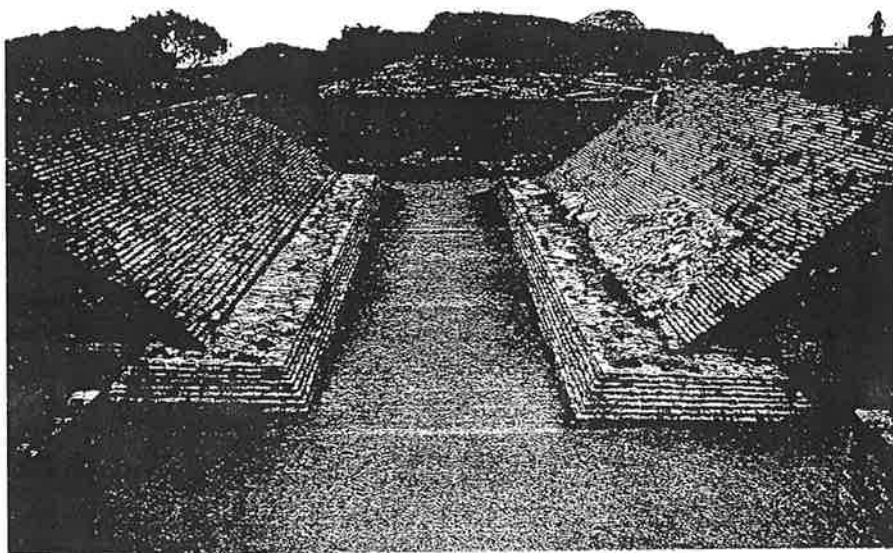
No other display of carved stones in Oaxaca really compares with this series of ballplayers from Dainzú. In his excavations at Monte Albán, however, Alfonso Caso found a carving of a ballplayer's mask, suggesting that such equipment was used at the capital as well.^{21,22}

On what type of court was this ballgame played? Evidently not on I-shaped courts like those at Monte Albán and San José Mogote, for Dainzú had no such court during Period II. Bernal and Oliveros suggest that Dainzú's carvings depict an early version of the ballgame, one that was played at Dainzú before Monte Albán had subdued the whole valley. That early game featured a ball about the size of an orange which was held, thrown, or struck with a reinforced glove. It may have been played on rectangular courts that would be difficult to identify archaeologically; Dainzú has several 20-m by 20-m plazas that could have been ballcourts.

222 (Left) Carved stone from Dainzú showing a ballplayer with protective mask, gloves, and knee guards, holding a ball in his right hand.

223 (Right) Carved stone from Tomb 6 at Monte Albán, showing a ballplayer's protective mask. Height 40 cm.

224 I-shaped ballcourt on the east side of the Main Plaza at Monte Albán. Maximum length 41 m.



225 Plan of the ballcourt on the west side of the Main Plaza at San José Mogote. Maximum length 41 m.

With the emergence of the state, however, came the formalization of a new ballgame, played on I-shaped courts with high sloping walls to either side of the central playing area. So standardized are our few Monte Albán II-III examples of these courts that we suspect we are dealing with an "official" game. The courts on the Main Plazas at Monte Albán and San José Mogote are virtually identical: 41 m in maximum length and 24 m in maximum width, with a central court 26–27 m long.

This later type of court was called *lachi* by the Zapotec, and the game was called *queye* or *quiye*. While we do not know the rules by which it was played, it probably resembled the Aztec game called *olamalitzli* or *ulama*, in which the ball could not be touched with the hands; it was struck instead with the hips, elbows, and head as in modern soccer.²³

The Dainzú Ballcourt: A Cautionary Tale

The later version of the ballgame was also played at Dainzú, on an I-shaped court built long after the period we are discussing. The excavation of that ballcourt provides us with a cautionary tale for archaeologists, to wit: no ballcourt can be dated until it has been excavated.

Given the numerous Monte Albán Ic-II depictions of ballplayers at Dainzú, Bernal and Oliveros had every reason to assume that Dainzú's I-shaped ballcourt would date to the same period. In addition, when the members of the Settlement Pattern Project surveyed Dainzú, they found abundant sherds of Monte Albán Ic-II pottery around the ballcourt.²⁴ When the Dainzú court was finally excavated, however, Bernal and Oliveros found that it had been built very late in the period called Monte Albán IV (perhaps AD 900–1000). Moreover, it did not have the standard dimensions of the Period II ballcourts at Monte Albán and San José Mogote, but was smaller. The reason so many Monte Albán I-II sherds can be found around the court is that thousands of basketloads of earth containing these sherds had been dug up and used in the fill of the structure.

Ballcourts and the Administrative Hierarchy

At what tiers in the Monte Albán II site hierarchy did ballcourts appear, and what was their “official” function? Both questions are hard to answer. The Settlement Pattern Project located almost 40 ballcourts in the Valley of Oaxaca,²⁵ but most remain unexcavated and therefore undated. If we limit ourselves to *excavated* courts, we would have to say that in Period II they were built only at Tier 1 and Tier 2 settlements.

Why would the early Zapotec state invest in the construction and standardization of I-shaped ballcourts, in effect promoting an “official” game? No one is sure, but some scholars believe that the ballgame played a role in conflict resolution between communities. It has been suggested that when two opposing towns competed in a state-supervised athletic contest, held on a standardized court at their regional administrative center, the outcome of the game might be taken as a sign of supernatural support for the victorious community. This, in turn, might lessen the likelihood that the two towns would actually go to war.

 Parallel Developments Elsewhere in Mesoamerica

In Chapter 9 we made the point that chiefly societies in Oaxaca did not arise in a vacuum. Despite ethnic and environmental differences between Oaxaca, Morelos, and southern Veracruz, social evolution in all three areas showed strikingly similar patterns.

The archaic Zapotec state did not arise in a vacuum either. In the Central Depression of Chiapas – a region ethnically different, warmer, and wetter – another archaic state arose during a time equivalent to Monte Albán II. Its palaces and royal tombs were comparable to Monte Albán’s, and its temples provocatively similar.

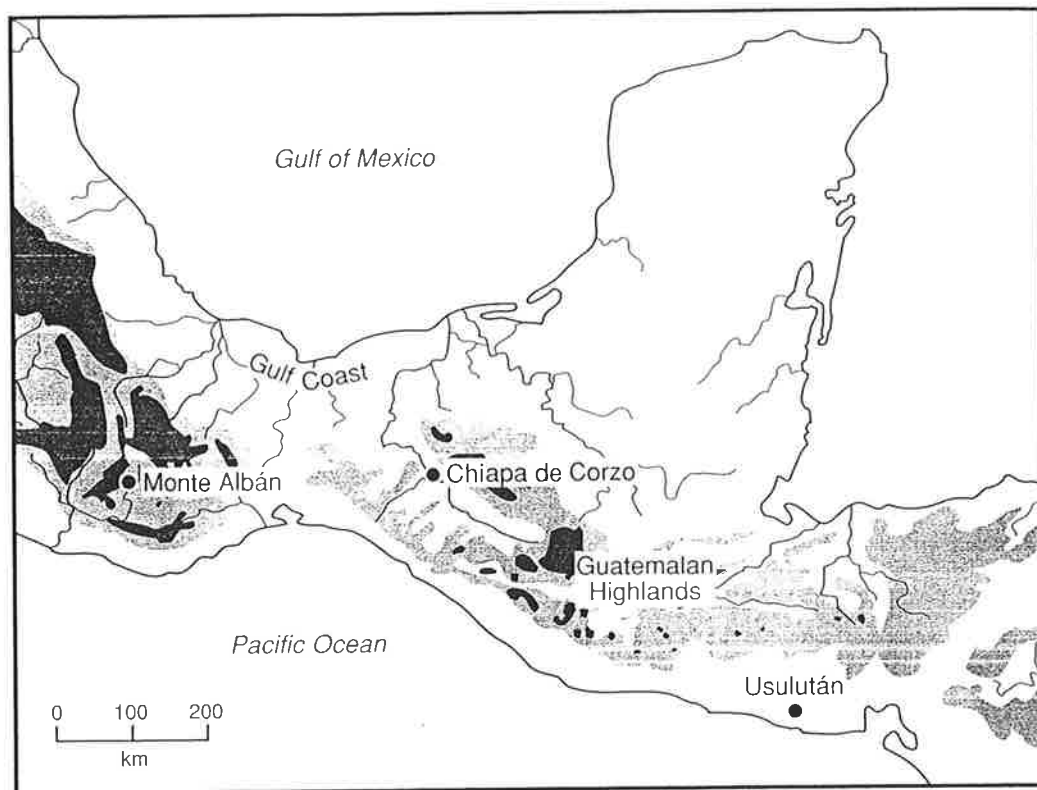
The ruins of Chiapa de Corzo extend for more than 1 square km along the right bank of the Grijalva River, some 385 km east of Monte Albán. Here the great river flows at 400 m elevation through a tropical valley receiving 800 mm of rainfall. Unlike Monte Albán, Chiapa de Corzo was not created by synoikism, nor was it in a defensible locality. It grew from a village whose history goes back before 1000 BC.

The Palace

Many of the buildings around Chiapa de Corzo’s main plaza reached maximum size during the period 150 BC–AD 150. Structure H1 of Mound 5, on the east side of the plaza, is the best preserved palace known from the period. Excavated by Gareth Lowe, the building was roughly 26 × 16 m and sat atop an even larger platform with a massive stairway and balustrades.²⁶

Like Oaxaca’s governmental palaces, Structure H1 would seem to be an administrative building whose residential quarters (if any) were in the rear. The first room entered is described by Lowe as a “grand entranceway, reception room, or gathering place,” 8 × 5 m in extent. Its walls were of adobes covered with lime plaster, its roof supported by wooden columns. Behind it lies a complex that could be residential: three small rooms grouped around a sunken courtyard whose doorways were flanked by columns.

To either side of this central complex of rooms are small courts, corridors,



226 Chiapa de Corzo lies in the Grijalva River depression, some 385 km east of Monte Albán.

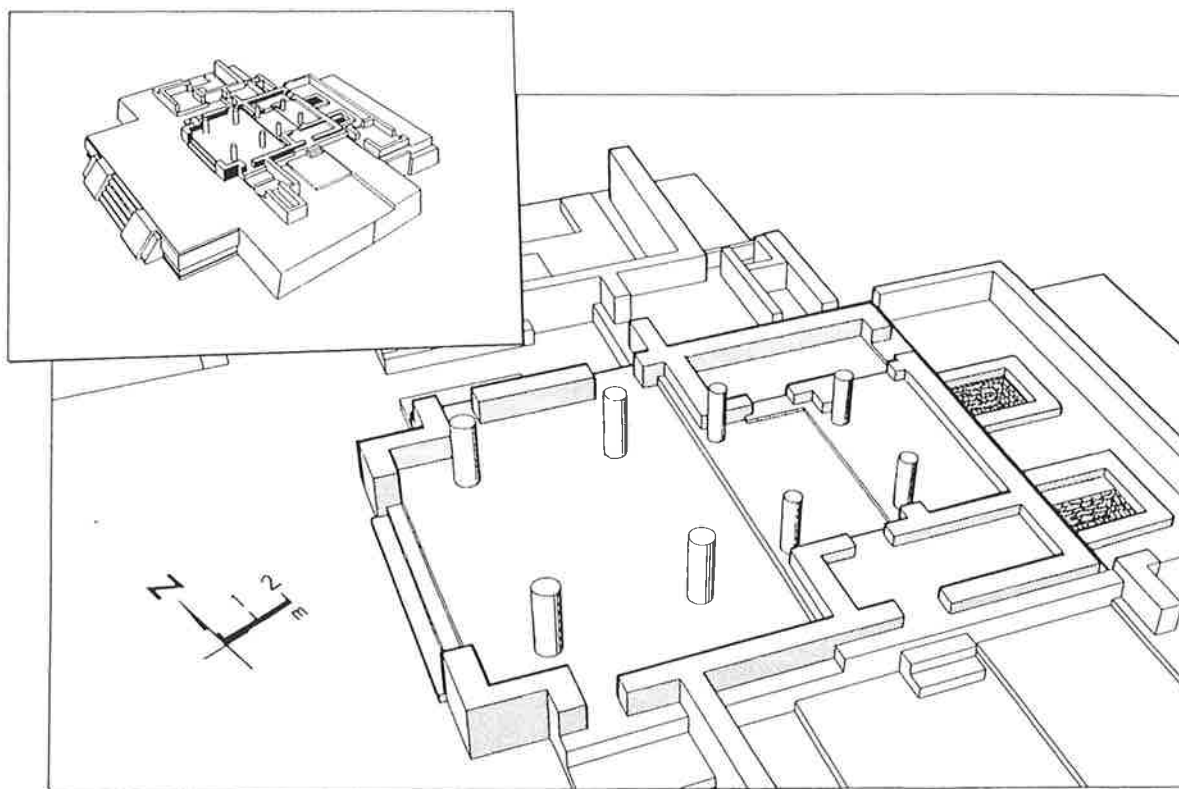
and accessory units that may have been kitchens, servants' quarters, or store-rooms. At the rear of the palace are two unusual features that may be storage cellars of some kind. Covering only a few square meters, each descended 2.5 m into the underlying platform.

Just as interesting as this palace was the destruction it had suffered. Its occupants had evidently been overthrown, and the palace heavily burned, at roughly AD 100. Accompanying this destruction came "an abrupt change in associated ceramics" denoting "a very definite cultural and probably ethnic shift" at Chiapa de Corzo.²⁷ This event reminds us that violent competition between elites (already seen in the Rosario phase) continued unabated after the emergence of the state. We do not know where the destroyers of Structure H1 came from. There are hints in the new ceramic styles of AD 100–200 that they may have come from regions to the east.

Here we see, for the first time, an archaeological phenomenon usually associated with conquest or colonization by a foreign power: abrupt replacement of the local pottery style by one from another region. In Chapter 14 we will see how this phenomenon helps us to document conquest and colonization by the Monte Albán II state.

The Royal Tomb

The elite of Chiapa de Corzo, like their Zapotec counterparts, were buried in elaborate tombs. One of the most interesting was Tomb 7, excavated deep in the



bedrock below Mound 1. This tomb, dating to the first or second century BC,²⁸ had walls of adobe brick and a roof of sandstone slabs. Inside lay a young adult on a litter of wooden planks. Adorning the corpse were a jade necklace and composite jade and shell ear ornaments. Two chalcedony spear points and a large obsidian knife had been left in one corner of the tomb.

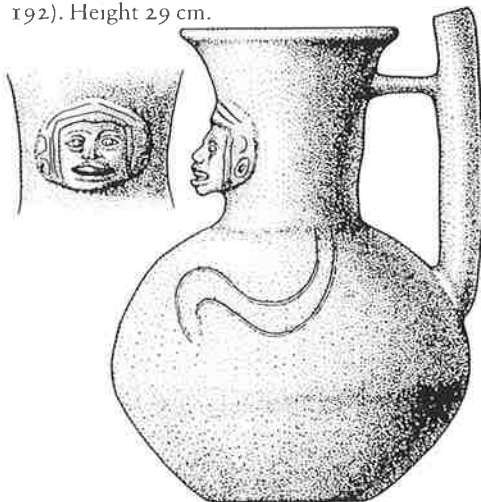
Perhaps most significant was the tomb's offering of 35 pottery vessels, every one of which was imported from elsewhere.²⁹ Included were stucco-painted vessels from the region of Usulután, El Salvador; white-rim black vessels from the Gulf Coast of Veracruz; fluted red vessels of the Chicanel or Arenal cultures, Guatemala; and effigy bridgespout jars in Oaxaca gray ware, identical to those found at Monte Albán, San José Mogote, and Tomaltepec. It is thus possible that the individual in Tomb 7, in addition to the privilege of being transported in a litter, was given a funeral attended by ambassadors with gifts from many other regions of Mesoamerica.

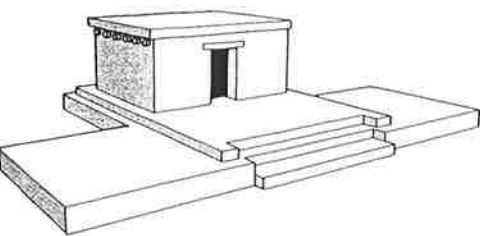
The Two-Room Temple

Following the death of the noble in Tomb 7, Mound 1 at Chiapa de Corzo underwent several phases of monumental construction. By the first century AD it had been turned into a platform 70 × 40 m in extent, forming the southern border of the site's main plaza. Virtually every structure it supported was a temple of some kind; Structure 1A, excavated by Pierre Agrinier, is particularly interesting because it captures the emergence of the two-room temple.³⁰

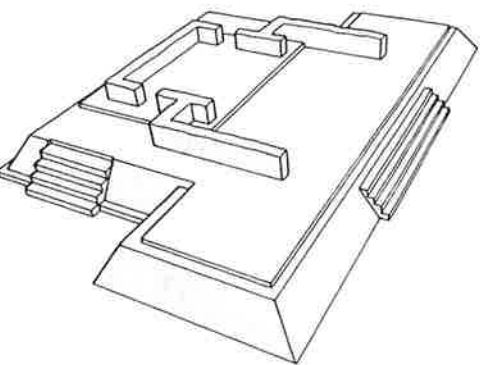
227 Artist's reconstruction of Structure H1 at Chiapa de Corzo. The small inset (upper left) shows the building on its platform.

228 Effigy bridgespout jar of Oaxaca gray ware, found in Tomb 7 at Chiapa de Corzo. This vessel should be compared with those from Burials 5a and 5b at Abasolo (ill. 192). Height 29 cm.

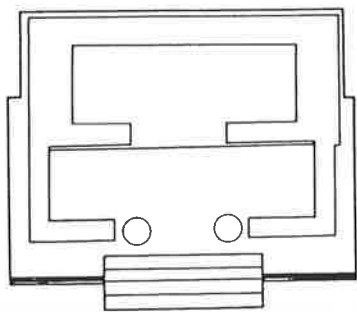




229 Stage G5 of Structure 1A at Chiapa de Corzo, a one-room temple.



230 Stage G2 of Structure 1A at Chiapa de Corzo, a two-room temple with separate stairways for priests and worshipers.



231 Structure 11b, Chiapa de Corzo, a standard two-room temple with columns flanking the outer doorway.

In ill. 229 we see Stage G5 of Structure 1A. At this time, perhaps 250–200 BC, it was a one-room temple 4–5 m on a side, built of adobes and small stones; its walls were covered with clay and its floor with lime plaster.

Between the next two building stages (G4 and G3), a second room was built in front of the previously existing one. The back walls of this outer chamber, which was 27 m² in extent, abutted the sides of the inner room. That inner room was now given two doorways on either side, one of which led to a stairway. By Stage G2 – perhaps 150–100 BC – the floor of the inner room had been raised 15 cm above the floor of the outer room.

The architects of Chiapa de Corzo had now created their own version of the two-room temple. It had a private side entrance for the priests, while ordinary worshipers would have climbed a large stairway to the front entrance. While still lacking the columns of Monte Albán II temples, Structure 1A at Chiapa de Corzo was in all other ways equivalent.

By AD 100–200, following the destruction of the palace on Mound 5, the people of Chiapa de Corzo were building colonnaded temples as well. Structure 11b of Mound 1, shown in ill. 231, was a small two-room temple (48 m²) with columns to either side of the outer doorway. Such temples went on to be popular over the whole of Mesoamerica during the next millennium.

Conclusions

How are we to understand the remarkably similar emergence of the governmental palace, the royal tomb, and the colonnaded two-room temple in Chiapas and Oaxaca between 150 BC and AD 200? Once again we conclude that social evolution does not take place in isolation, and that ecological functionalism explains little of what happened.

Monte Albán, sitting on a walled mountaintop in temperate Oaxaca, arose through rapid urban relocation and supported itself with piedmont irrigation. Chiapa de Corzo grew slowly along the floodplain of a tropical river, farming a region with half again the rainfall of Oaxaca. Each region must be understood in its own environmental setting, yet each produced a state whose political and religious institutions had strikingly similar building plans.

We have suggested that the Zapotec state formed when the polity centered at Monte Albán began to subdue the valley's other polities, reducing them to provinces of a single system. We cannot argue that Chiapa de Corzo took over the Grijalva Valley in the same way. What we *can* argue is that Monte Albán and Chiapa de Corzo were in such close contact that Zapotec bridgespout jars were placed in a Chiapa de Corzo ruler's tomb.

We can also show that competition for positions of leadership was so violent in both regions that Chiapa de Corzo's palace was burned, and Monte Albán built defensive walls. Each region knew the other's political strategies, and neither region's elite would allow themselves to be outdone. Each undoubtedly borrowed ideas from the other, and despite the confident predictions of ecological functionalists, both regions produced similar state institutions at roughly the same period.