
1. Introduction

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THE DISCOVERY

According to several old men of the village of Chalcatzingo, who in their youth at the turn of the century tended cattle and cut firewood on the slopes of the Cerro Chalcatzingo, carved rocks and pieces of stone idols then lay partially exposed in the terraced fields. When playing among the large boulders on the hillside, they occasionally encountered carved rock faces but "they were not important to us, and we did not tell anyone."

Other villagers' oral tradition relating to the discovery of the first reliefs is somewhat different, but actually only involves the carving known as "El Rey" high on the mountainside. It is this carving which first attracted outside attention to the site. The tradition, as told to me by several villagers, is that one night in 1932 there was a tremendous storm. At the height of the storm, a rain serpent came over the top of the *cerro* and washed the hillside and flooded the fields. It carried a great deal of soil onto the lower fields. The next morning a group of villagers went up the hill to inspect the damage to their fields. Some children cutting wood from fallen trees on the hillside called to them. They climbed up the hill to see what the children wanted and found "El Rey."

Although "El Rey" may have been partially exposed at this time, it was another two years before it received public or professional notice, and then apparently from two different sources at almost the same time. The first is documented by a letter to the Secretaría de Educación Pública, dated February 23, 1934, on file at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH, file VIII-I [311 (724-9)]-6-1). In this letter a group of "explorers" report the finding of "hieroglyphics" on a rock face of the *cerro de la cantera* (referred to in this book by its other name, the Cerro Chalcatzingo).

The letter goes on to mention that they cleared soil away from below the "hieroglyphs" and discovered an "*idolo*" (the seated personage shown on the "El Rey" relief).

In March of the same year, INAH archaeologist Eulalia Guzmán visited Chalcatzingo to see the carvings, which had been reported to her by a woman who lived in the area (Guzmán 1934:237). Her publication described not only "El Rey" (Mon. 1), but also the carvings numbered 2, 6, 8, and 16 in this book. Her illustration of "El Rey" (1934: Fig. 3) depicts the entire carving, indicating that by this time any soil deposits covering the relief had been cleared away.

Guzmán was unable to attribute Chalcatzingo's rock art to any specific Mesoamerican culture group. The pottery she examined from the site was a mix of both "Teotihuacan" and "Archaic" (Formative period) sherds. In her publication she wondered, "Should we say then that the people of an archaic culture group or early Teotihuacanos were the authors of these beautiful reliefs or must we look to other culture groups such as the Olmeca?" (1934:251; my translation).

It was nearly another two decades before Chalcatzingo received actual archaeological investigations. These were initiated in 1952 by archaeologist Román Piña Chan, who, as part of his investigations of Formative period sites in Morelos, excavated eleven stratigraphic pits on Chalcatzingo's terraced hillside (Piña Chan 1955). On the basis of the ceramic stratigraphy from that work, he concluded that the site had begun as a small farming community, that it shared the same cultural tradition as the Valley of Mexico, and that during the Middle Preclassic period an "archaic Olmec" group had coexisted with the farming population at Chalcatzingo and had lent the site its distinctive cultural character.

The carvings he assigned to the Late Preclassic period, 500–200 BC.

Until the initiation of the Chalcatzingo Project, no other excavations were carried out at the site, although some looting did take place. However, the site was not ignored but gained increasing interest, and several publications on the bas-relief art appeared which also added newly discovered carvings (e.g., Cook de Leonard 1967; Gay 1966; 1972a; Grove 1968a). My doctoral research on the Formative period in central and eastern Morelos (Grove 1968b) included reconnaissance and surface collections at Chalcatzingo done in 1966 and 1967. This resulted in my own analysis of the carvings (1968a) and thoughts of the importance of the site's location (1968c), and served to stimulate the steps leading ultimately to the project reported in this book.

THE PROJECT AND THE VILLAGE

The Chalcatzingo Project began in 1972 and was a cooperative research project of the University of Illinois and the Morelos-Guerrero Regional Center of INAH. The goals of the project were oriented toward a synchronic view of the Formative period site and its local, regional, and extraregional interactions (see Fig. 1.1), rather than to a cultural historical reconstruction. The research approach is best understood against the background of change and innovation which characterized Mesoamerican archaeology in the 1960's. We borrowed greatly from the multidisciplinary approaches of the Tehuacan Valley Project directed by Richard MacNeish, the Fundación Alemana's work in Puebla and Tlaxcala, and Kent Flannery's Valley of Oaxaca Project, as well as the projects of William Sanders, Jeffrey Parsons, and Richard Blanton, who carried out large-scale regional reconnaissance in the Val-

ley of Mexico. As the decade drew to a close, Michael Coe's excavations at the Gulf Coast Olmec site of San Lorenzo and the work of Paul Tolstoy and others in Mexico's central highlands raised serious questions about the validity of long-established ceramic chronologies and explanations of cultural development.

Thus, when the Chalcatzingo Project began its first six-month season of field work in 1972, the validity of previous data was questionable, and we worked on the assumption that we were essentially starting from scratch. We attempted to disregard all previous hypotheses regarding the site and its chronology, and worked to gather the archaeological data necessary to arrive at our own conclusions. We were also aware that our research would be of little value if restricted to the site itself. Chalcatzingo had not existed in a vacuum and to ignore its local physical and cultural setting would have been a grievous error. We were fortunate therefore that our research funding allowed us to expand some phases of our investigations throughout the valley of the Río Amatzinac. This funding also allowed us to have the site mapped by photogrammetry (Fig. 1.2), thus permitting complete concentration by field personnel on the excavations as well as insuring an accurate map.

As a cooperative, joint research venture, the project had both a Mexican and a U.S. director, as well as student field assistants from both countries. To a very large extent, however, the fortunes of the project depended upon the villagers of Chalcatzingo. Although we arrived in 1972 carrying a stack of official permits from the federal, state, and municipal governments, the people of Chalcatzingo felt far removed from those agencies and quite correctly evaluated our proposed excavations on their communal village lands in terms of their impact upon the community and its individual citizens. At an evening assembly attended by most of the village's adult males, the project was hotly debated, and even after those assembled had voted their approval, a dwindling but vocal minority remained opposed to the excavations during most of the first field season.

To be honest, the villagers' nearly unanimous approval was certainly not motivated by their perception of the scientific merits of the proposed research. It was due to the fact that the project would bring employment to Chalcatzingo during the dry season, a period

of chronic village unemployment. Nearly all adult males in the village wanted to work for the project, and at the request of the village officials (the *ayudante* and the *comisario ejidal*), a rotation system for workers was instituted. This system used the village's communal work rolls. All males over eighteen years of age are obligated to carry out some work for the community during the year, such as road repairs or nightly vigilance patrols, and workers for this labor are taken from the communal labor roll. Men not carrying out their community work obligations were excluded from the rotation list provided by the village authorities to our project each Friday. While the rotation system meant that we did not control the total pool of the thirty to thirty-five workers needed weekly, we were allowed to retain certain skilled individuals as "crew chiefs" from week to week.

Of course, the rotation system was not without its problems, one of which was simply cultural. The village communal labor obligations were required only of adult males, and thus the rotation system was completely male. However, once the project began, a number of women, primarily widowed or unmarried, requested work. A hiring system was set up to accommodate them as well. Although we were not permitted to use women as excavation workers, we did have tasks which the village did not see as impinging upon male jobs, such as on-site artifact washing and cataloguing. Men and women received equal wages.

In spite of minor opposition to the project in its first few months, the villagers soon became enthusiastic supporters of the work. Monument 12, which had been discovered by a few villagers earlier and then reburied, was refound and shown to us. Several workers subsequently informed us that the brief 1955 excavations had not been quite as fortunate, for they claim that a carving was found near the small Classic period pyramid reconstructed at that time, but hidden from the archaeologists (although no one was certain exactly where). Often during our project when a significant discovery was made, work was halted so that all of the workers (usually scattered at excavations across the site) could share in the find and have its importance explained to them. Visits by villagers and classes from the village school were encouraged.

With the village's growing understanding of their archaeological site came a

new pride. Where previously outsiders would hire villagers to loot the site, such outsiders are now turned away. Where it had once been common for visitors to outline certain carvings in chalk or charcoal prior to photographing them, the villagers recently forced such an individual to walk back to the site with a bucket of water and scrub brush to clean off his charcoal outlinings. And whereas prior to the project just one villager had served as guide and earned tips from visitors, now many villagers understand something of the site and offer their services.

Although Chalcatzingo had been famous as an archaeological site for years prior to our excavations, it had not been an official "national monument." Today, we hope in part due to our project, the site enjoys such status, and a guard keeps the monuments clear of weeds and protects against looting or vandalism. A cobblestone road now connects the village and the site. Unfortunately, an increase in tourism and the slow spread of urbanization outward from Mexico City affects Chalcatzingo not only positively but, on occasion, negatively as well. Today some villagers have sold their private lands between the village and the site, and on my last visit several small weekend bungalows marred the previously uncluttered and magnificent landscape dominated by Chalcatzingo's twin peaks.

The authors of the chapters in this book were, with few exceptions, active participants in the field work. Their presentations are for the most part descriptive and data-oriented. The intent in most chapters has been to present and discuss the basic data and to offer our interpretations. We have attempted to present most of the material in a way that will permit others to carry out different forms of analyses on their own. Some chapters therefore have tables and complementary appendices which provide further data. Unfortunately, those readers who desire level-by-level ceramic type or figurine tabulations will not find such data here. Although we recognize their desirability, the counts are too voluminous to present in that fashion, and alternate means of publication are being explored. Abbreviated or combined counts would be of doubtful value.

The book is essentially subdivided into seven topical sections. Chapters 2-4 introduce the site and its geographical-ecological setting. The general region, the Amatzinac Valley, and the village and

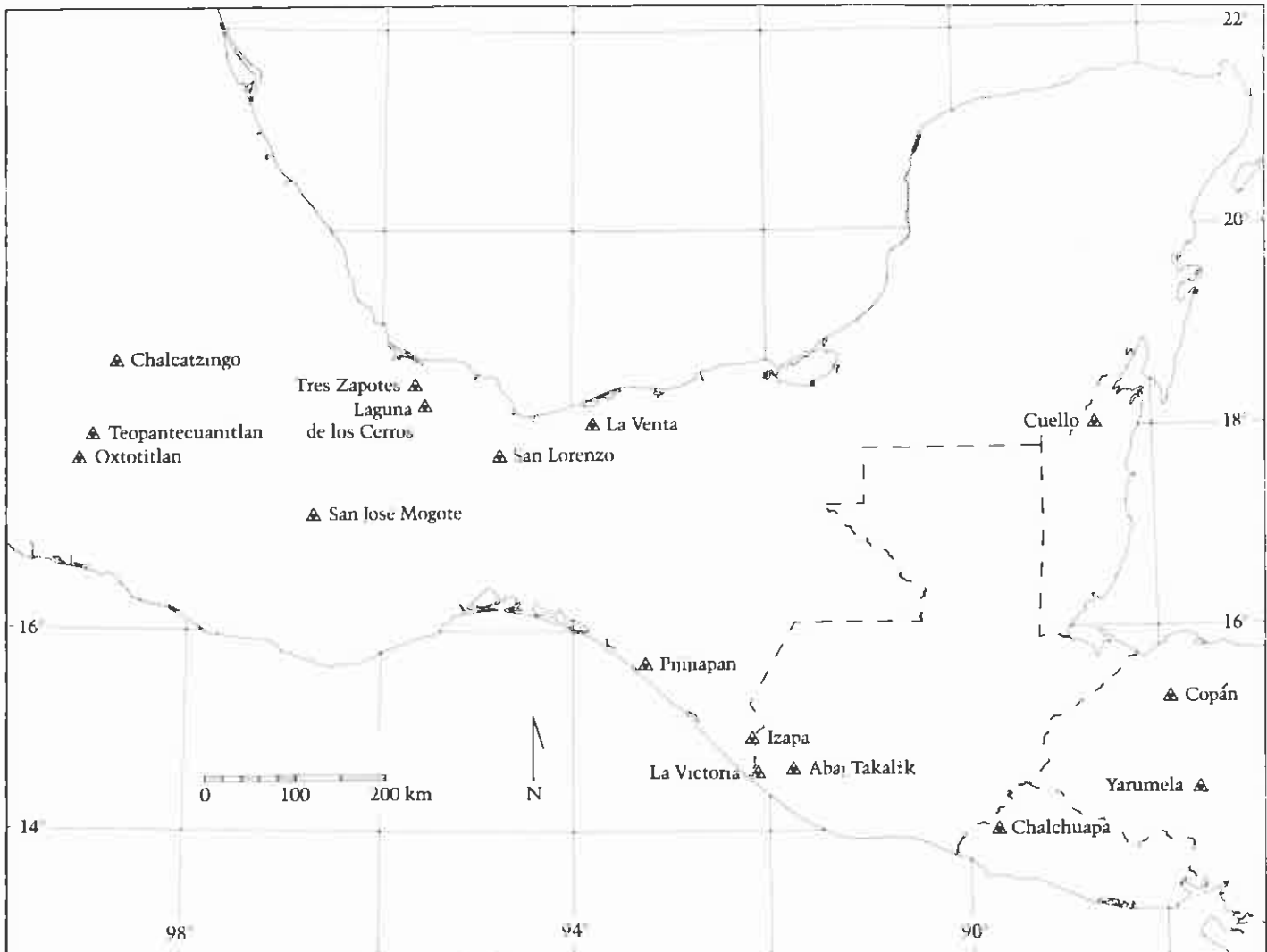


Figure 1.1. Mesoamerica, showing sites mentioned in the book.

archaeological zone of Chalcatzingo are described in Chapter 2. One aspect of the Chalcatzingo research involved a study of the ecology and paleoecology of the site, and this is discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents comments on excavation methods and summarizes the excavations of each terrace.

Discussion of particular aspects of the site begins with Chapter 5, which deals with the construction of the chronological sequence and the more than fifty radiocarbon dates which assist in placing the three major phases in time. Public and residential architecture and the nature of the settlement are treated in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 is devoted entirely to the table-top altar and associated burials discovered on Terrace 25. Chapter 8 provides a discussion of the burials re-

covered by our excavations, and the burial data are used to reconstruct the social ranking within the community.

Chapters 9–12 form a section devoted to Chalcatzingo's carvings and paintings. This section begins with Chapter 9's descriptive, non-interpretive catalog of the site's carved monuments. This is followed by an interpretation of the carved art in Chapter 10. Not all carved rocks at the site can be classified as monuments, and these miscellaneous carved rocks are cataloged and described in Chapter 11. Chapter 12 offers a comprehensive description of Chalcatzingo's plentiful but little-known painted art.

Chapters 13–20 present and discuss the artifacts recovered by the excavations. Ceramics, discussed in Chapter 13, received the longest treatment. That

chapter not only presents the ceramic typology, but also provides comparisons to Gulf Coast ceramic assemblages studied as part of our ceramic analyses. Figurines are discussed in Chapter 14, and Chapter 15 provides the results of a recent whole-piece analysis of the figurines. Special ceramic artifacts, as well as those of shell, iron ore, bone, etc., are documented in Chapter 16. Chapter 17 discusses Chalcatzingo's jades. Chapters 18, 19, and 20 all deal with lithic artifacts. Chapter 18 provides data on general chipped stone industries, and Chapter 19 deals specifically with the blade workshop debris uncovered on Terrace 37. All varieties of ground stone are presented in Chapter 20.

Chapter 21 begins the section focusing on Chalcatzingo's regional ties with a

discussion and analysis of regional settlement. Excavations at Telixtac and Huazulco are summarized in Chapter 22, and raw material sources and their exploitation by Chalcatzingo are covered in Chapter 23.

Moving away from the Formative period concentration of the book, Chapter 24 provides a discussion of the Classic and Postclassic archaeological remains at the site. Chapter 25 continues with a description of a Middle Postclassic house excavated at the Tetla area of Chalcatzingo, and analyzes the data in terms of local and regional considerations. This is followed in Chapter 26 with a discussion of contemporary agricultural practices at

Chalcatzingo. No attempt is made to discuss the ethnology of the modern village, for this has been well presented by L. Miguel Morayta (1980).

The concluding section begins with Chapter 27, which presents my comments on various aspects of the data presented in other chapters but with an emphasis on Chalcatzingo as a site and its local interactions. In Chapter 28 the site is discussed from the viewpoint of regional interactions. It is in this last chapter that the archaeological data are discussed in terms of various models proposed to "explain" Chalcatzingo, and the chapter ends with my own views on the site and its development.

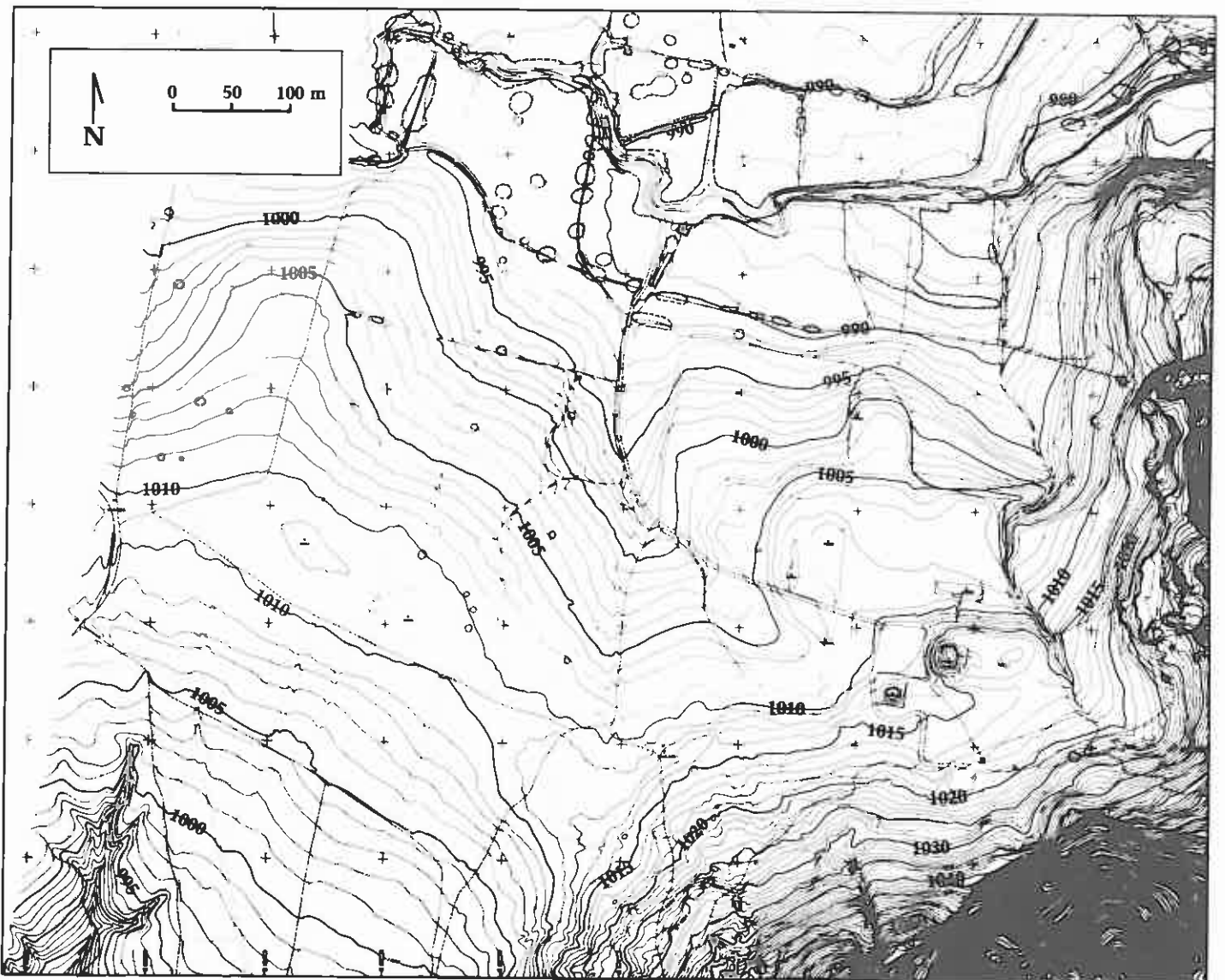


Figure 1.2. Topographic map of Chalcatzingo's Formative period site area. Contour interval 1 m.

RESUMEN DEL CAPÍTULO 1

El sitio arqueológico de Chalcatzingo, Morelos, es conocido por sus bajorrelieves desde los años treinta, cuando por primera vez tuvieron noticia de su existencia las autoridades del INAH. El sitio fue visitado por Eulalia Guzmán en 1934, pero las investigaciones arqueológicas empezaron sólo en 1952 bajo la dirección de Román Piña Chan, quien excavó once pozos estratigráficos en las terrazas de las laderas del cerro.

El proyecto Chalcatzingo comenzó en 1972, como un proyecto de investigación conjunta de la Universidad de Illinois y el Centro Regional de Morelos-Guerrero del INAH. Este proyecto tenía por objetivo el llegar a obtener una visión sincrónica del sitio, en el período Formativo, y de sus interacciones a nivel local, regional, y extra-regional. Otro objetivo consistió en esclarecer la posición de Chalcatzingo dentro de la secuencia cronológica del período Formativo en el Centro de México.

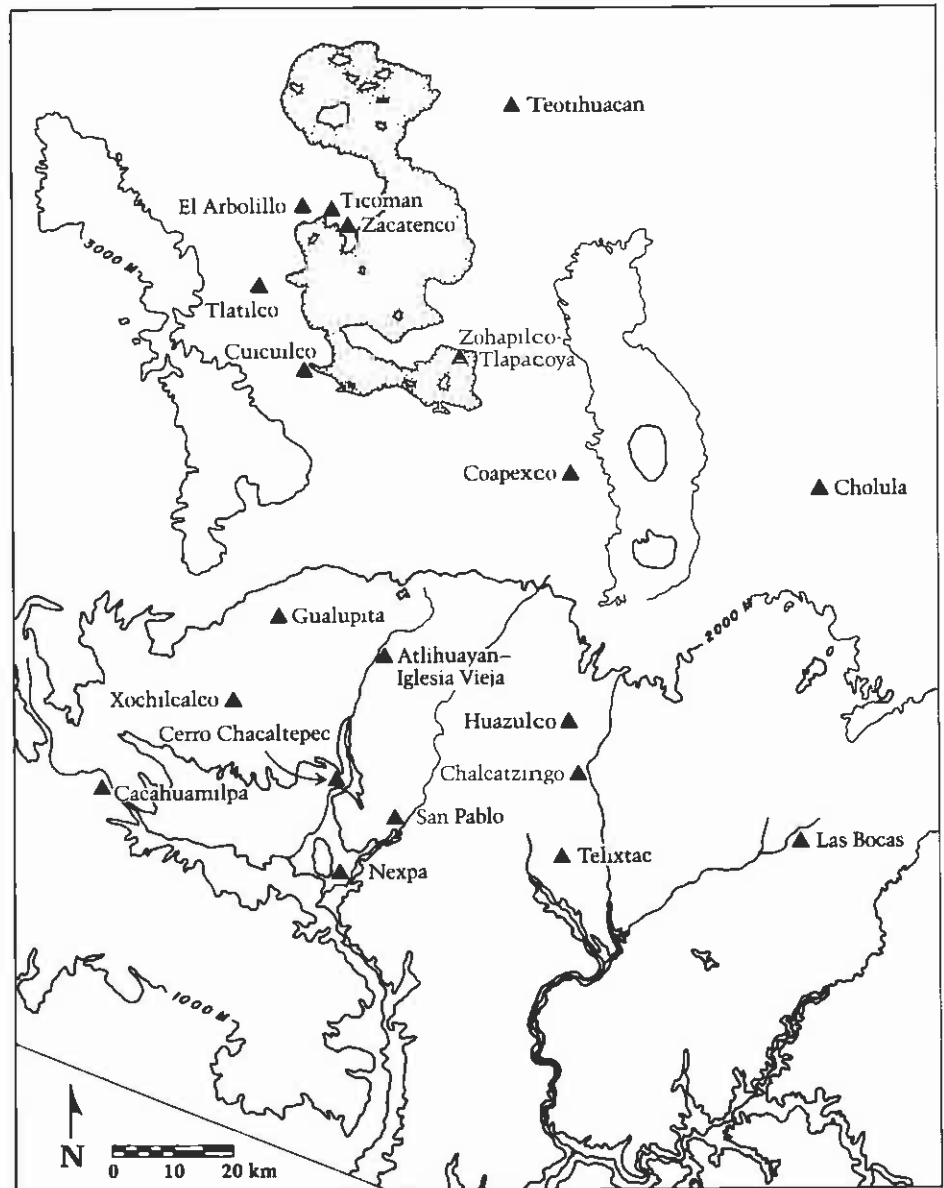


Figure 1.3. Central Mexico, showing archaeological sites mentioned in the book.