

NECLAS: Acocotla: Historical Archaeology at a Central Mexican Hacienda

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In this paper, I present some of the results of a four-year interdisciplinary study of the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla and its descendant community in Atlixco, Puebla, Mexico. My research was designed to recover information relating to the daily lives of indigenous *peones* living at and working for the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla during the 100 years leading up to the Mexican Revolution, and to explore the ways in which their daily lives impacted the development of the Mexican Revolution and agrarian reforms that followed. Understanding the creation, maintenance and perpetuation of power structures was central to my research. I found that a mid-19th century period of modernization, industrialization and globalization generated new forms of social control that threatened the indigenous community at the most intimate levels. During the second half of the 19th century, Hacienda owners instituted systems of social control using tactics as grandiose as the redesign of Hacienda architecture and as modest as the arrangement of kitchen space. These systems of social control were invasive, unprecedented in the region and undermined community and family structures with roots in the pre-Hispanic world. Ultimately, attempts at modernization failed. Attacks on the community and family structure of Acocotla's indigenous workers ended with the early 20th century eruption of the Mexican Revolution.

(SLIDE 2—AGRICULTURAL FIELDS). The Valley of Atlixco is located in the western portion of the modern day state of Puebla. The Valley sits at approximately 1,800 meters above sea level and east of a line of hills that run south from the summit of the Popocateptl volcano. When the Spanish began to settle the area in the mid-16th century, they found that the climate and agricultural conditions were ideal for the production of wheat. Within fifty years, Atlixco became one of the primary production centers for the European-introduced domesticate, with more than 90 haciendas dedicated to its cultivation (Chevalier 1963:64). The Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla was one of these.

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(SLIDE 3—HAROLD AT CHAPEL) During this project's initial phase, Dr. Harold Juli of Connecticut College conducted an informal visual survey of ten haciendas in the Puebla and Tlaxcala region to develop an understanding of the nature of regional settlement patterns, site preservation and the potential for archaeological and ethnographic research. Through this survey, Dr. Juli identified San Miguel Acocotla as an excellent candidate for research. The abandoned hacienda possesses many of the classic features of the regional architectural form. While the main house is in a poor state of preservation, the area of worker housing, called the *calpanaría* **(SLIDE 4—CALPANARÍA WITH VOLCANO)**, along the Hacienda's south wall, was sufficiently well-preserved to suggest that a profitable archaeological study would be feasible. This zone is comprised of 37 small adobe rooms adjacent to a fallow field that was the area of worker housing and domestic activities during at least the 19th and 20th centuries, if not during the earlier colonial era as well. Further, the village of La Soledad Morelos, located two kilometers to the south of the Hacienda ruins, is home to former hacienda workers and their descendants.

(SLIDE 5—MAP OF REGION) The Hacienda is located approximately ten kilometers southwest of Atlixco at 1770 meters above sea level. Acocotla was founded in 1577 by Lucas Perez Maldonado, the first of 25 proprietors. The Hacienda functioned as an institution for some 370 years until the end of the Mexican Revolution. During the 20 years following the Revolution, Acocotla's lands were both expropriated and sold to its former workforce. Intensive research in local, state and national archives has shown, somewhat unsurprisingly, that the historical record was dominated by the elite members of the Hacienda community. Written records for the first and last fifty years of the Hacienda's history were the most extensive, but data from the other periods were largely limited to bills of sale as the Hacienda transferred ownership.

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(SLIDE 6—WORKER LIST FROM 1894). Our greatest interest, however, was in documenting the lives of the indigenous workers at Acocotla. While most of the recovered historical records did not pertain to the daily life and working conditions of the *peones*, this population could be seen historically in worker employment lists which include information on their level of literacy, whether they spoke *Nahuatl* or Spanish, their marital status, age, education level and health (Romano 2005). These lists, however, appear only during the second half of the 19th century. **(CLICK)** The sole mention of workers prior to this period is found in a late-17th century bill of sale, which includes, among the Hacienda's possessions, *eight Indian workers and three that walk absent* who were listed among the Hacienda's assets between the plows and the water rights included with the property.

(SLIDE 7—STUDENTS CONDUCTING INTERVIEW) To balance the incomplete historical record, Dr. Juli and I set out a program of archaeological, ethnographic and ethnohistorical research. In the village of La Soledad Morelos, we worked with students from the University of the Americas in Puebla to collect oral histories related to life on nearby Haciendas before, during and after the Mexican Revolution. **(SLIDE 8—LSM)** We also conducted an intensive study of modern land use, mapped 5 percent of the domestic compounds in the village, and interviewed inhabitants about the ways in which space was used. Because of the similarity in architectural forms between the worker housing at the Hacienda and the house compounds in the village, we expected these data would allow us to draw analogies between use of space in the present and use of space in the past. Simultaneously, we conducted two seasons of archaeological research in the *calpanería* and field fronting that architectural space **(SLIDE 9—EXCAVATIONS)**. The archaeological research involved an extensive program of architectural recording and mapping, surface survey, and stratigraphic excavations conducted both inside the rooms and in the field in front of the *calpanería*.

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Archaeological excavations resulted in a detailed record of Hacienda architecture, along with more than 87,000 artifacts.

(SLIDE 10—HACIENDA MAP) During our studies, we interviewed six informants who had worked at the Hacienda during its operations regarding the use of space at Acocotla during the early years of the 20th century. The walking tour I'm about to take you on draws on the information obtained during these interviews.

Today, one approaches the Hacienda Acocotla from the east, as visitors approached during most of its history. Our first glimpse of the Hacienda is a lookout tower (**CLICK**), built during the tumultuous early years of the Mexican Revolution and, across the road, the small chapel that served the entire Hacienda community from the 17th century on (**CLICK**). Documentary evidence suggests that this area would have been the front entrance of the Hacienda, leading directly into the *hacendado's* living quarters until approximately 1860. Today, we have to pass wheat storage sheds and follow another curve in the road to arrive at Acocotla's south-facing entrance (**CLICK**).

During the latter years of the 19th century, the plain, imposing entrance that we are confronted with today was flanked by 37 small rooms, called the *calpanería* (27). (**CLICK**) The remains of these rooms are still visible along the south-facing wall. Though the visible architecture is today limited primarily to naked adobe, as well as a few faced stones and bricks, the 19th century façade of the Hacienda would have been finished in white plaster, and the rooms of the *calpanería* would have been roofed in red pan tile. The *calpanería* and field in front were inhabited by the Hacienda's resident workers and their families during the second half of the 19th century. As many as 121 men, women and children lived in these 3.5 meter by 3.5 meter rooms, though the population fluctuated, dropping as low as 34 in 1857. The field fronting the *calpanería* would have been used

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during this period of residence for daily activities, as suggested by ethnoarchaeological and archaeological research.

Leaving the *calpanería* behind, we move back to Acocotla's main entrance. The archway leading to the interior of the Hacienda would have once been barred with an imposing wooden door, though this has long since been scavenged for other constructions. Passing through the doorway today, we are greeted by the remains of a two-room guard house on the left-hand side of the passageway before access paths branch in three directions. Walking past the guardhouse and glancing to the left, we see a large patio area. During the 19th century, rooms bounding the edges of this patio stored farm implements and other tools necessary to hacienda life and work. **(CLICK)** The north side of the patio is dominated by an ornate arch which leads us to the animal patio, an area that would have housed both cows and horses, as well as provided storage for animal fodder.

Returning to the central corridor and guard house, we follow the right-hand access path into the *Patio de Los Chivos*. **(CLICK)** At the end of the 19th century, this area housed the *caporales*, the most trusted of the Hacienda's workers. The *caporales* were responsible for the Hacienda's animals and seem to have had special control over the goat herds, with whom they shared this living space. Interviews with former hacienda workers and their descendants suggest the position of *caporal* was a mark of status and deeply envied by those who failed to attain this rank.

(CLICK) Returning again to the central access path, we follow it north through another arched entryway to the *Patio Abierto*. This patio provided storage for tools, especially those associated with the animals, as well as more stable space for both horses and cows. This area was normally accessible only to the manager, the *caporales* in their business with the herds and the *peones* who were employed to cook and clean in the *hacendado's* living quarters; however, on Saturdays everybody entered this area to collect their week's wages. This space also housed the manager's

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office and the *hacendado's* kitchen. Both were located in the Southeast corner of the patio adjacent to the arch leading to the final area of the Hacienda. **(CLICK)**

Walking past the remains of the manager's office, a set of double arches leads us into the *Patio del Limon*. This highly restricted space would have been the *Hacendado's* living quarters when he and his family were in residence. Other than the hacienda owner, his family and guests, the only people allowed into this space would have been the manager and the few *peones* paid to cook and clean for the family. During the Hacienda's occupation, this open-air patio was filled with lime trees. An ornate fountain is still in evidence in the center of the patio, though much of its stone has been taken for reuse. **(CLICK)** The area has experienced extensive looting, but numerous decorative elements are still visible, including both ornamental and functional arches and pillars, designs painted in red on white plaster, and even a mosaic of glass around a window.

As mentioned earlier, the ruins of the Hacienda as they appear today seem to be largely the result of a program of construction and expansion dating to after 1860. Prior to this period, the central constructions of the Hacienda seem to have centered on what is now the *Patio del Limon*. After 1860, however, Acocotla underwent drastic remodeling that made the structure more complex, a remodeling that would have created a highly controlled, hierarchical space.

This architectural reconfiguration of Acocotla's landscape reflects the social world of late-19th century Mexico. The century between the Wars of Independence and Revolution was dangerous and chaotic. Elites struggled to maintain control over the economy and government, while the poor felt their long-held control over basic subsistence and village independence slip from an ever-increasingly tenuous grasp (Tutino 1986). Historical data from this period suggest that Acocotla and the surrounding villages, ranchos and haciendas were no exception. The frequent

turnover of workers found in the historical records further supports the idea that this was a period of instability.

(SLIDE 11—JUSTIFIED ACCESS DIAGRAM) Archaeologists working on historic period sites in the New World have identified architectural designs during the late 18th and 19th centuries which are driven by the need to create and control a subservient population. The design of both public and private spaces was intended to exhibit, maintain and perpetuate discipline. This intention was derived from Baroque theories of power which, in the words of Mark Leone, “attempted to establish stratified social hierarchies by creating environments that proclaimed a natural law dependent on divinely ordained, natural hierarchies”(Leone 1995:255, see also Bacon 1967; Foucault 1979; Lefebvre 1991). We see just such a pattern at Acocotla. This justified access diagram illustrates the architectural complexity of the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla after its remodeling. Each access level is symbolized by colors which darken as access becomes more restricted. I argue that this mid-19th century creation of a complex architectural structure with separate, controlled and defined spaces dedicated to particular tasks as seen here was part of the intent to control the hacienda’s workers. Compartmentalization and specialization of space has been shown time and again to be part of processes of modernization and embedded in the development of capitalism (e.g. Deetz 1977; Giddens 1984; Glassie 1987; Jamieson 2000; Johnson 1996). By creating spaces with highly specific and clearly defined uses, Acocotla’s owner was creating an environment in which the ways individuals moved through the space, used time and completed tasks was carefully controlled.

The connection between status and architecture is clear. Individuals with the lowest status, namely the workers, were largely restricted to level one access points, though they may have occasionally been allowed into levels two and three to assist with animal care. The *caporales*,

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described as both “higher status” and “more trusted” by our informants, occupied rooms at the third level of access and, thanks to their duties with the animals, would have had access to areas in levels 1-4. Both the *peones* and the *caporales* were allowed into the *Patio Abierto*, to the very edge of the *Hacendado’s* living quarters, in order to accept their payment for the week’s work, an event that would have seemed ceremonious as they were handed their weekly salary and maize rations while the manager made notes of the exchange in his account books.

The manager’s office was placed in the space between the “work” areas of the Hacienda and the living areas of the Hacienda owner. Administratively, the manager was the gatekeeper, controlling access to the interior living space of the *hacendado* and his family, and the architectural placement of the manager’s office reflects this role. The *Patio del Limon* is clearly the most restricted space in the hacienda and simultaneously the most self-sufficient. Once they had passed through the working areas of the Hacienda upon arrival, the *hacendado* and his family could lock themselves in the *Patio* and live in uninterrupted luxury if they so chose.

The few workers allowed into the *Patio del Limon* would have found themselves in a world wholly different from that occupied by the rest of the inhabitants of the Hacienda Acocotla. The few informants who were able to describe the *Patio* before its ruin did so with emotion approaching reverence. They described a quiet space filled with lime trees and flowering plants, dominated by an elaborate fountain in the center. The walls surrounding this patio today show the remnants of what must have once been impressive decoration, adding to the experience of those allowed into the space. While we were able to collect two recollections of the patio space, not a single former worker was found who could describe the interiors of the rooms surrounding the *Patio*, supporting the suggestion that these spaces were even more restricted. As discussed above, the creation of complex architectural space during the late 18th and 19th century is often seen as an attempt to naturalize the

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social order (e.g. Bacon 1967; Epperson 1990; Foucault 1979; Giddens 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Leone 1995). The *Patio del Limon* speaks to this architectural pattern. In creating an area so sumptuously distinct and inaccessible to the majority of the Hacienda's inhabitants, Acocotla's owners confirmed their right to the position of power they held over the lives of their workers.

(SLIDE 12—MAP FROM COYULA) But what of the *calpanaría* where the hacienda's workers spent the majority of their time. It too seems to be part of the program of modernization and control seen in the organization of the Hacienda's architecture. The *calpanaría*, as it is seen at Acocotla, is a distinctly 19th century architectural form. Prior to independence, resident workers were housed on hacienda land, but separate from the hacienda's administrative and residential buildings **(CLICK)**, as seen in this map from the neighboring town of San Jeronimo Coyula.

(CLICK) Though these residences would have been under the control of the *hacendado*, workers inhabiting these spaces would have had a reasonable measure of autonomy in arranging their family lives and community organization.

(SLIDE 13—CALPANARIA AND FRONT ENTRANCE) During the 19th century, this pattern of residence changed throughout central Mexico as the *calpanaría* as it is recognized today was introduced. At Acocotla, archaeological evidence indicates that the *calpanaría* was constructed during the 1860's and then expanded again later in the century. During this initial construction period, the Hacienda's workers would have been taken out of semi-independent villages and moved into what we might call "company housing." The *calpanaría* was designed by and for the *hacendado*, not by or for the individuals who would be housed in the space. The new worker housing would have facilitated control, naturalized the social structure, and allowed the *hacendado* to commodify labor across gender lines in ways it had never before been. First, by designing a structure that was open, linear, fronting the road and flanking to entrance to the

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Hacienda, the *hacendado* and his architect created a space that would encourage the *peones* to engage in a self-reflexive monitoring of their actions. Because anybody could pass by the *calpanaría* at any time and because the *hacendado* or his manager could approach or emerge from the Hacienda at any moment, the *peones* would have been required to behave always as if they were being watched.

Further, by creating multiple “levels” of housing for different “classes” of worker, the *hacendado* was reinforcing and naturalizing the social order. **(SLIDE 14—CHIVOS)** The “higher status” and “more trusted” *caporales* occupied a space that was private and enclosed. Though the area was adjacent to the guard house, the *caporales* would have enjoyed much more privacy and a greater level of security. While the *peones* living in the *calpanaría* had to ask permission to enter the hacienda to collect water from the animal troughs for cooking and other household needs, the *caporales* had free and easy access to such necessities.

Finally, and most importantly, the *hacendado* was able to design a domestic space that undermined traditional family organization and cultural mores while building an increasingly productive and cost-effective workforce. **(SLIDE 15—LSM COMPOUNDS)** Arrangement of kitchen space provides a prime example of the ways the *hacendado* was able to achieve these goals. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the goals of the ethnographic research was to record details of daily life and use of domestic space in order to contextualize the archaeological remains. Detailed studies of the domestic compounds at La Soledad Morelos found that kitchen areas were of primary importance for women and families. In many ways, these spaces might be connected to what James Lockhart identifies as “women’s houses” in his “Nahuas After Conquest” and indeed, there seem to be pre-Hispanic models for similar and equally important spaces. In La Soledad Morelos today, kitchens are of such high importance that EVERY FEMALE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD **(CLICK)** has her own kitchen-space, regardless of other living arrangements. Even

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in situations where the entire family is sharing a single bedroom, and even in cases where the mother-in-law is no longer responsible for food production, each woman has her own, dedicated kitchen space without exception.

During our collection of oral histories, we asked informants about the provisions made for cooking space in the *calpanaría*. We were given three answers. First, that each family had been allotted two rooms, one for living and one for cooking. Second, that each family had a space in front of the *calpanaría* for cooking. Finally, that a single kitchen had been constructed and was staffed by a woman from the nearby village. **(SLIDE 16—KITCHEN DRAWING)**

Archaeological investigations revealed that the final of these three answers was correct. During our excavations we found only a single kitchen area constructed in just the way two of our informants had told us it would be. No other kitchen areas were encountered, and excavations inside of the *calpanaría* rooms indicated that they, too, had not been used for regular cooking activities. Many of our informants told us that women and children had been put to work regularly on the hacienda lands, something that was surprising given that historical documents listed only adult males as paid workers. In addition, one elderly woman told us that her mother had been employed as cook in the *calpanaría* during the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution.

When archaeological, oral historical and ethnographic data are pieced together, an unexpected picture emerges. Evidently, entire families living in the *calpanaría* were put to work in the Hacienda fields, regardless of gender or age, and a woman from the nearby community was brought in to cook for entire families. By so-organizing his workforce, the *hacendado* would have increased productivity over the short-term; however, he would also have been attacking family structures that had been in place since the pre-Hispanic period. In Nahuatl culture, a woman's *habitus* was largely defined by her role as cook and, more specifically, tortilla producer. The architectural

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space of her kitchen materially defined her role. When the *hacendado* deconstructed this space and forced her into the cash-economy, he was simultaneously deconstructing a woman's understanding of herself.

(Slide 17—FINAL) Research at the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla argues that Mexico's 19th century period of modernization resulted in profound attacks on community and family structure. By creating a hierarchical space during the redesign of the Hacienda's buildings as a whole and a living space in which production was privileged over family, the *hacendado*, and likely his compatriots, created a class dynamic ripe for rebellion. Reorganization instituted by the ruling classes reconstructed the bases of family and individual identities, an unprecedented situation. Communities were coopted into a class structure in new ways as seen in Hacienda architecture. Understandings of family were laid to waste as women and children were forced out of the home and into wage labor. It was an untenable situation, and these circumstances led to the Mexican Revolution.

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