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## **Urban Influences at Rural Sites: Teotihuacán and its near Hinterlands**



**Research Year:** 1998

**Culture:** Teotihuacán and Aztec

**Chronology:** Early Pre-Classic

**Location:** Teotihuacán, Central México

**Sites:** Various

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## Introduction and Background

The organization, structure, and integration of early states continue to be of interest to scholars of many disciplines, including those of history, political science, economics, anthropology, and archaeology. In the current study we proposed an examination of the extent and nature of the impact of Teotihuacán, the earliest urban center in the Basin of México, on several nearby rural sites in the Teotihuacán Valley east and north of the city ([Figure 1](#)). Of particular relevance to the proposed study were (1) the dominant presence in the urban setting of large and varied multi-family households in architectural units called "apartment compounds" by René Millon (1981), and (2) the comprehensiveness of urban planning within the city (Millon, 1973; Millon *et al.*, 1973).

Both "apartment compounds" and urban planning, clearly documented for the urban center, have been unequivocally documented only for "rural" sites (e.g. TC-8) ([Figure 1](#)) so close to the city that they might best be called "suburbs" (Charlton, 1987; 1991; Kolb and Sanders, 1996; Sanders and Kolb, 1996). Although there have been and continue to be intensive archaeological investigations within the urban center of Teotihuacán producing a good but incomplete grasp of Teotihuacán's urban, social, political, and ideological structure, along with information on residences and city-planning (e.g. Cabrera *et al.*, 1982a; 1982b; 1991; Millon, 1992), investigations of a similar intensity have been lacking for rural occupations (cf. Sanders *et al.*, 1979).

Prior to the current research there were, to the best of our knowledge, only two partial excavations of rural Teotihuacán households (TC-46) ([Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#)) and several minor test pit excavations at two other rural sites within Teotihuacán's near hinterland (TC-302, TC-87-89) (Charlton, 1973; 1987; 1994).

In addition there were site reconstructions (TC-40, TC-42, TC-73, TC-83) ([Figure 1](#)) based on survey and surface collection data (Sanders, 1994-96).

As a result our knowledge of such sites was inadequate to evaluate hypotheses concerning the degree of urban influence on rural sites in terms of residential unit composition and activities, the extent of the presence of urban town plans in rural contexts, and the degree of ideological similarity to Teotihuacán as seen through public buildings, their alignments, and figurine, ceramic, and mural painting iconography. These gaps in our knowledge of rural Teotihuacán period sites have been noted previously (Charlton, 1987; 1991; Sanders, 1994-96; 1997).

Although during the 30 years following the end of Sanders' Teotihuacán Valley Project there have been substantial changes to and at times destruction of archaeological sites in the Basin of México (e.g. Parsons, 1989), after a re-examination of rural Teotihuacán sites near the ancient city in 1995 Sanders proposed that some still retained enough

archaeological integrity to yield data addressing questions about the influence of Teotihuacán on nearby rural sites.

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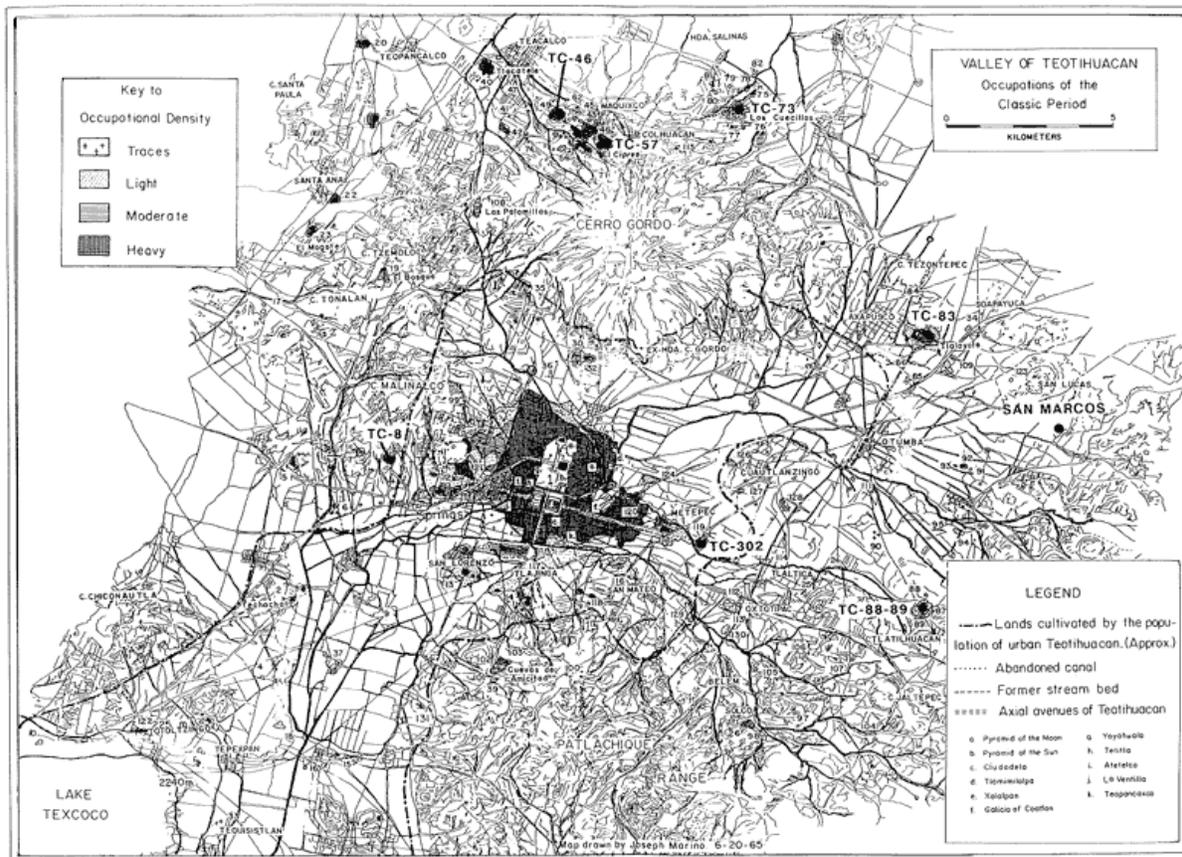


Figure 1. Teotihuacán Period Occupation, Teotihuacán Valley (after Sanders 1996, Fig. 173).

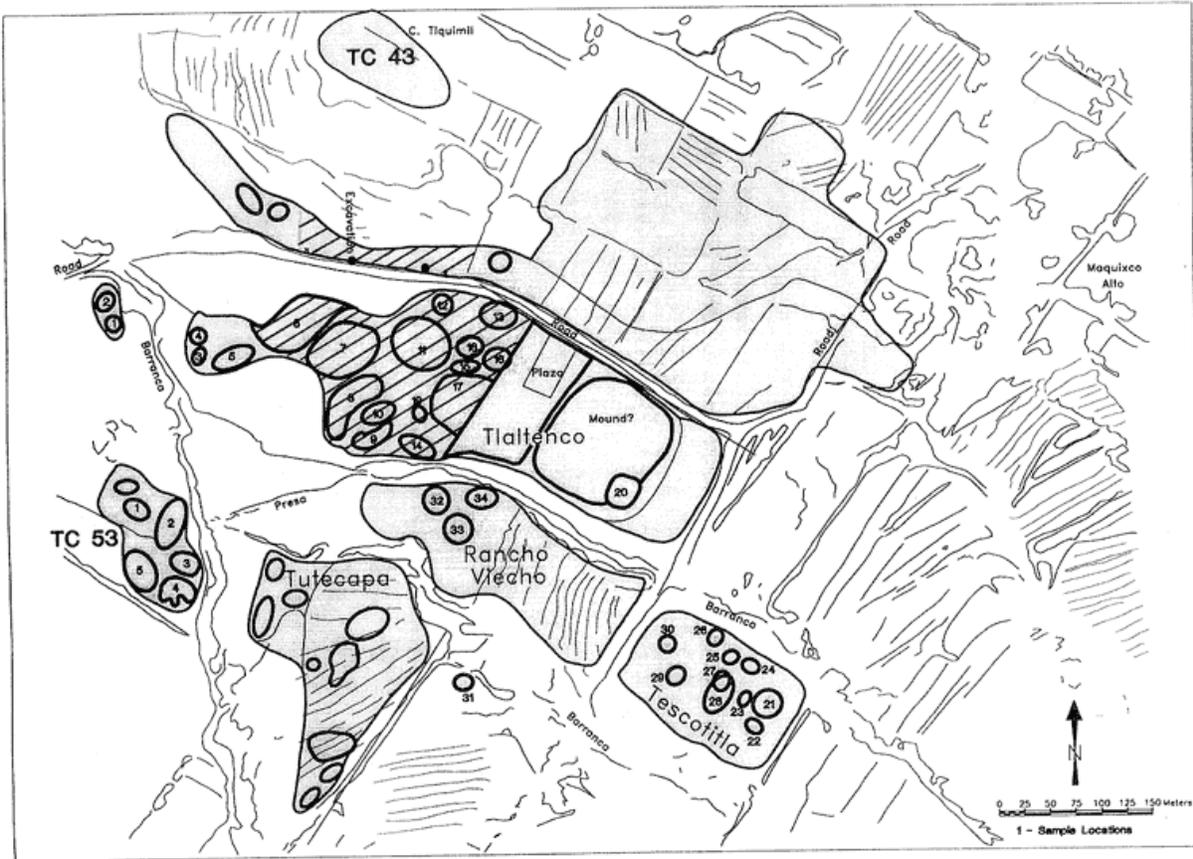


Figure 2. Teotihuacán Period Occupation, Cerro Gordo North Slope, Maquixco Alto Sub-Area, TC-46 (after Sanders 1996, Fig. 220).

### Proposed Research and Modifications

In order to remedy the situation we proposed archaeological studies of four such communities, TC-46, TC-73, TC-83, and TC-87-89 (Figure 1), among those re-examined by Sanders in 1995. We added a fifth Teotihuacán period site, San Marcos, discovered by Charlton and Otis Charlton in 1998 (Figure 1). Due to local community reticence to permit investigations at TC-46 we substituted TC-57, a nearby site (Figure 1).

These studies were to include surface surveys, mapping, random surface collections, and excavations of both test pits and broad areas of exposure where residential structures were located.

The specific areas of inquiry included: (1) the range of house sizes to be expected in rural Teotihuacán period sites; how much of the rural population lived in large multi-family "apartment compound" structures common in the urban setting and how many

resided in smaller structures suggesting nuclear family or small extended family units; (2) the extent to which the larger rural sites were fully urban with grid plans and alignments of ceremonial and residential structures similar or identical to those of Teotihuacán itself; (3) the degree of internal variation in size, composition, and socioeconomic status of households within rural Teotihuacán communities of different sizes and, presumably, functions.

Due to a late rainy season and harvest which constrained our access to the sites to a much shorter period than anticipated (ploughing and planting were underway almost immediately after harvesting in December and January in some areas and certainly by the end of March and the beginning of April) we had to delay the surface surveys and carry out only intentional, as opposed to random, surface collections in only three sites. Topographic mapping was limited to restricted areas within two sites. Excavations consisted of test pits in two of the sites.

Other factors affecting field-work were the necessity of extensive negotiations at various levels and with different organizations within several modern communities to gain access to lands, the need to coordinate the extent and location of excavations with the Consejo de Arqueología of INAH in accordance with the terms of the *permiso* issued to William T. Sanders as Director of the Project with Thomas H. Charlton and Cynthia L. Otis Charlton listed as Collaborators, the extreme intensification of agricultural activities in three of the five sites, and the increasing urbanization of a fourth. We visited the sites with a representative of the *Salvamento* office of INAH in the Edo. de México to enhance the protection of these sites.

Nevertheless we were able to carry out meaningful field research between November 9, 1998, and March 20, 1999, and have continued laboratory work since then. The results have clarified the Teotihuacán presence in rural sites in the near hinterlands, a clarification which will serve as the basis for subsequent field investigations.

## **Project Results**

### ***NORTH SLOPES OF CERRO GORDO***

*TC-46 [22.5 Ha.]*

#### *Surveys and Surface Collections*

We examined a section of this site ([Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#)) which falls within the public lands of the town of Santa María Maquixco el Alto and ascertained that there are still remains of Teotihuacán period mounds present along with traces of the walls and stucco floors of a possible "apartment compound" excavated in 1963 (Charlton, 1994). Another such unit excavated at the same time appears to have disappeared as a result of erosion, agricultural activity, or road construction.

Unfortunately we were unable to conclude a secure and mutually acceptable agreement with the townspeople and their representative which would allow us to carry out the proposed investigations at this site. Given this situation we examined the possibility of carrying out the investigations proposed for TC-46 at another site nearby, TC-57 ([Figure 1](#) and [Figure 3](#)).

*TC-57 [8.2 Ha.]*

#### *Surveys and Surface Collections*

Charlton and Otis Charlton examined TC-57 and noted that it still conformed to the description of Sanders with abundant stone and ceramic debris over the surface associated with some mounding suggesting the presence of traces of one or two houses below a modern terrace system constructed at the end of the 19th century or at the beginning of the 20th before the presence of heavy earth-moving agricultural equipment. After an initial survey we decided that the section which fell within the terrace system would be an acceptable alternative and serve in place of TC-46 taking into consideration the goals of the project ([Figure 3](#)).

In this site we carried out an intensive surface survey with surface collections from that part of the site located within the terrace system and characterized by remains of at least one domestic residence about 1 m in height and measuring approximately 120 m in length and varying between 40 and 80 m in width. The mound extended across several terraces and is covered with dense concentrations of large sherd fragments, fragments of manos and metates, and construction stone.

There is little evidence of earlier or later occupations. The extant mound which dates from Early Tlamimilolpa through Late Xolalpan/Metepec is probably representative of a modified "apartment compound" in a rural area. It is also possible that the mounding may represent two or more smaller structures, a determination which could not really be made without excavations which we did not have time to carry out. At the moment the preliminary analyses suggest that the site functioned as a rural agricultural community.

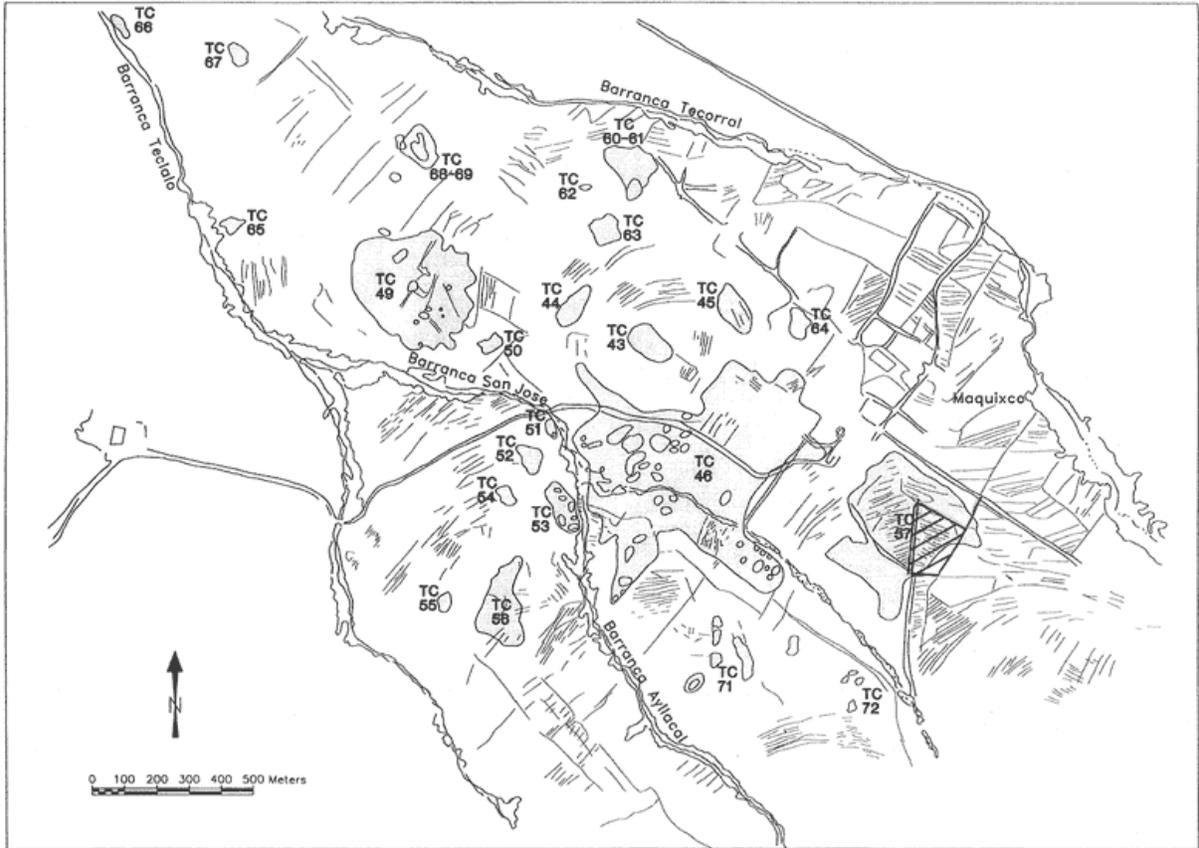


Figure 3. Teotihuacán Period Occupation, Cerro Gordo North Slope, TC-57 (after Sanders 1996, Fig. 203).

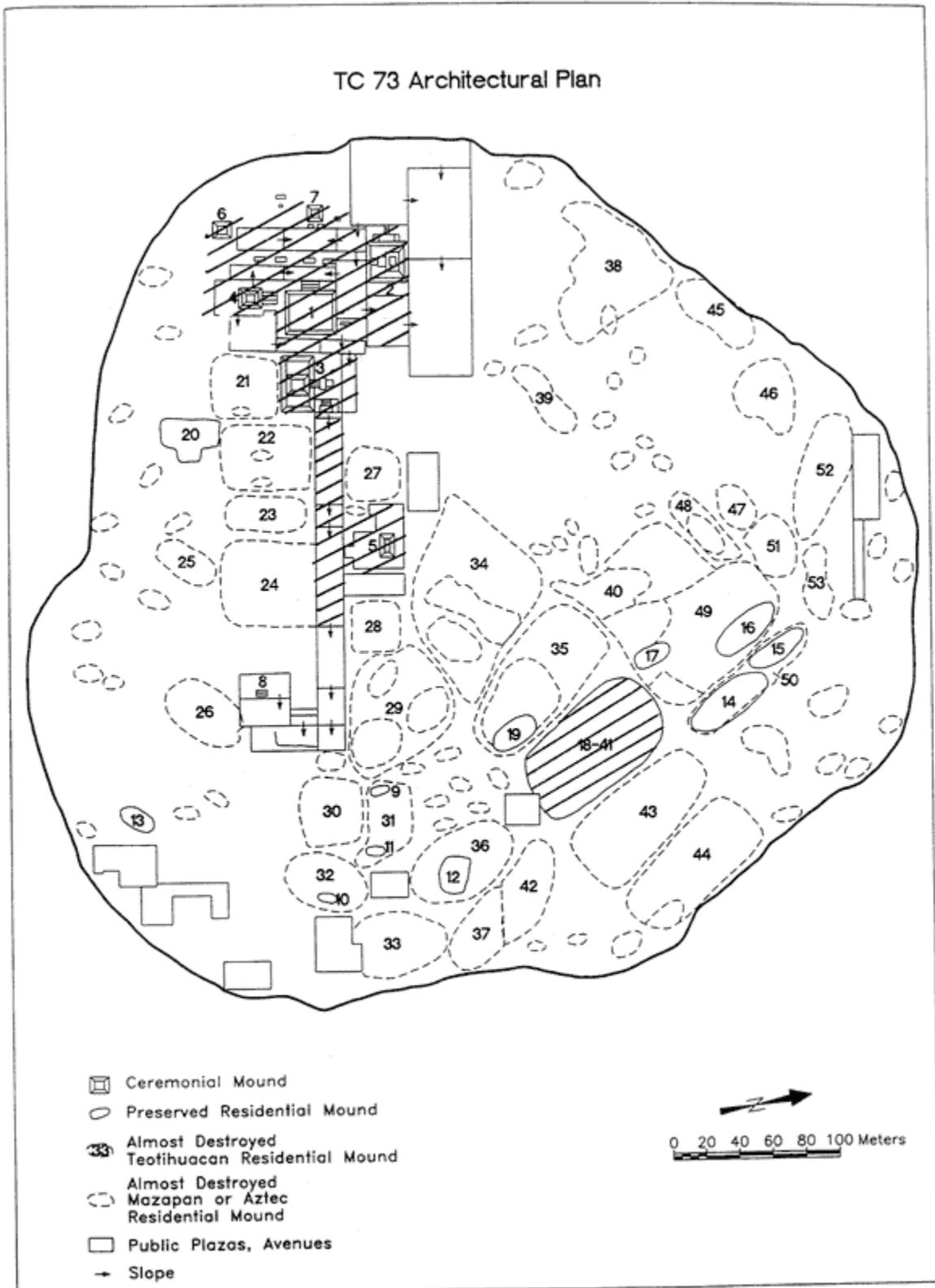


Figure 4. TC-73, Cerro Gordo North Slope, Architecture and 1998-99 Collections (after Sanders 1996, Fig. 205).

TC-73 [21 Ha.]

### *Surveys and Surface Collections*

Within the rural zone north of Cerro Gordo we also examined TC-73 ([Figure 1](#) and [Figure 4](#)), which Sanders had proposed as a provincial center. We carried out surveys over the entire surface of the site to determine its current condition and the state of preservation of the structures encountered and recorded previously (Sanders, 1994-96). We made surface collections within the areas of the site marked with diagonal hatching in Figure 4. Our observations permitted us to make some decisions about the probability of carrying out productive excavations here in the future.

We determined that the section of the site which contains the greatest number of Teotihuacán period domestic structures had been severely modified by heavy equipment used in agriculture, chisel ploughing, terrace building with bull-dozers, and discing of fields. As a result it appears that only a single domestic mound still preserves an archaeological integrity adequate for intensive investigations. The mound ([Figure 4:18-41](#)) has a height between 1 and 2 m, a length of 100 m and a width between 50 and 60 m. Some illicit excavations have exposed a east-west wall oriented at 77 degrees east of north. According to Kolb and Sanders (1996:584) this mound is equivalent to "apartment compounds" from TC-8 and from the urban center of Teotihuacán. They considered it to be much larger than the other residences of TC-73. Those, as we have noted above, have been severely modified.

Within the ceremonial core of the site ([Figure 4](#)) there still persist some traces of site planning with a central avenue oriented east-west (similar to the orientation of the East-West Avenue of Teotihuacán according to Sanders and Kolb, 1996) with public mounds and plazas. In our surveys we encountered a great deal of destruction through agricultural expansion and through illicit excavations into all of the mounds.

Although the surveys and surface collections from the residential complexes in the east and south-east of the site clearly show traces of Teotihuacán period (Early Tlamimilolpa through Late Xolalpan/Metepec) construction and occupation, the ceramics from the surface of the public structures in the west of the site have fewer sherds and the majority of those are Late Aztec in date. Obviously it is possible that the destruction which has occurred may have mixed and hidden the Teotihuacán period occupation and that the Aztec sherds originate in more recent deposits built over the Teotihuacán structures. In order to resolve this problem we will have to carry out excavations. At the present time there still is sufficient preservation to justify excavations with the goal of determining the chronology and orientation of public structures and the orientation and internal structure and size of at least the one well-preserved residential structure.

## **EASTERN TEOTIHUACÁN VALLEY**

*TC-83 [26 Ha]*

### *Surveys and Surface Collections*

TC-83 is located in the eastern Teotihuacán Valley ([Figure 1](#) and [Figure 5](#)). This site was identified by Sanders as a provincial center. We surveyed and collected from this site during trade route surveys in 1975. We carried out resurveys during our current project in order to determine the current state of preservation of mounds recorded previously and to estimate the possibility of productive excavations in the future. We also made additional surface collections. The site area as determined by our surveys is marked on Sanders' map with a dashed line and several mounds that are still partially intact are marked with solid lines.

We determined that although the sections of the site which contain domestic Teotihuacán period structures have been modified with agricultural machinery and by the construction of new residences within the Colonia San Bartolo Alto, there are still Teotihuacán period mound remnants present. We relocated the large public mound located by Joseph Marino in 1963 and in 1975 by Otis Charlton. A chapel has been constructed on the summit of the mound ([Plate 1](#)). However the section behind the mound and the area of the associated precinct appear to us to still be in good condition.

The traces of the residential complexes are marked by stuccoed floors and walls of stones with mud mortar exposed by a road cut which crosses the site. These architectural figures are associated with a low (50 cm) mound with dense concentrations of sherds. In addition, in the western section of the site there are traces of another residential complex with a height from .5 to 1 m and a diameter of about 50 m. The surface of this mound is covered with dense concentrations of Teotihuacán period (Early Tlamimilolpa to Late Xolalpan/Metepec) sherds and with construction stone. It is possible that the complexes are equivalent to those at Teotihuacán but excavations are necessary to verify this. This is also true of the public structures here at TC-73. It is necessary to excavate in order to distinguish between the Teotihuacán period constructions and those of later periods.

Although the surveys and surface collections, both of the public structures as well as from residential complexes, contain some sherds from periods after Teotihuacán (Mazapan, Aztec) those from the Teotihuacán period dominate the collections from these two types of structures. Although there are effects of agricultural intensification and increased urbanization within the site there still is enough preservation to support investigations into the organization, structure, and functioning of the site and its public and residential buildings.

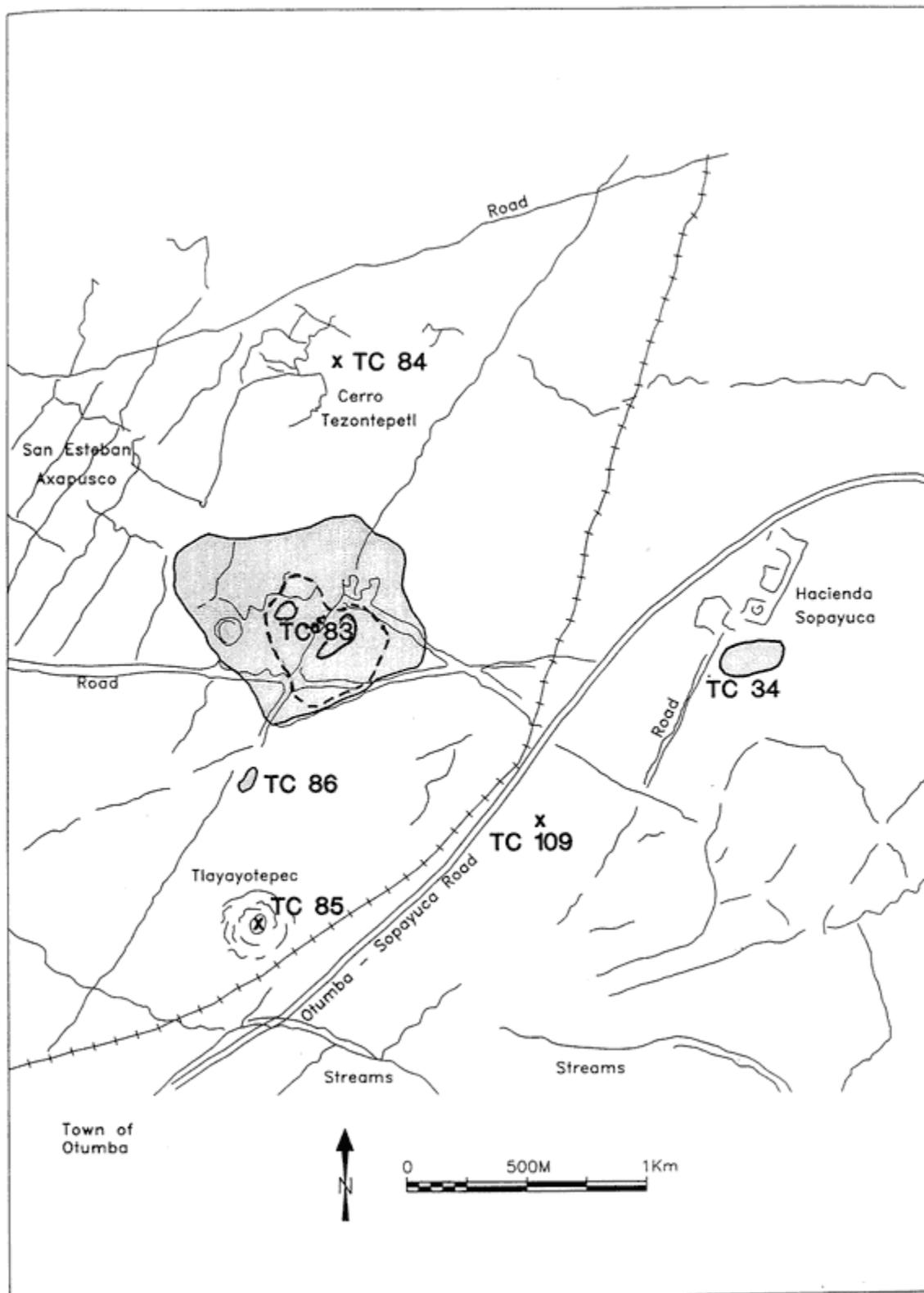


Figure 5. TC-83, Eastern Teotihuacán Valley, with Mounds and 1998-99 Site Area (after Sanders 1996, Fig. 199).



**Plate 1. TC-83. Chapel on Mound with Precinct Area in foreground.**

*San Marcos [12 ha. Teotihuacán Component]*

*Surveys and Surface Collections*

We carried out intensive surface surveys with surface collections at this site ([Figure 1](#) and [Figure 6](#)) in order to define the size, chronology, and structure of the site. Although there are major occupations from the Mazapan and Aztec periods, we did confirm the Teotihuacán period occupation within a zone of about 12 ha located in the central area of the later occupations. There are some mounds within this zone and on its edges which show good evidence of Teotihuacán period construction.

During surveys we located a Teotihuacán mound which in its totality measures approximately 100 m x 100 m with a maximum height of 3 m. This seems to be clear evidence of an "apartment compound" mound from Teotihuacán found in a rural area. There are stucco floors exposed in a cut made by a road grader in the process of leveling the mound for a sports field. We managed to stop the destruction with the active intervention of the Salvamento Office from INAH, Edo. de México ([Plate 2](#)). We made a topographic plan of the remaining mound ([Figure 7](#)) as a first step in investigating a more intensive investigation with excavations. Although the entire site area has been seriously disturbed by ploughing (chisel and discing) along with some

bull-dozing of structures, there are still some traces of earlier structures and occupations.

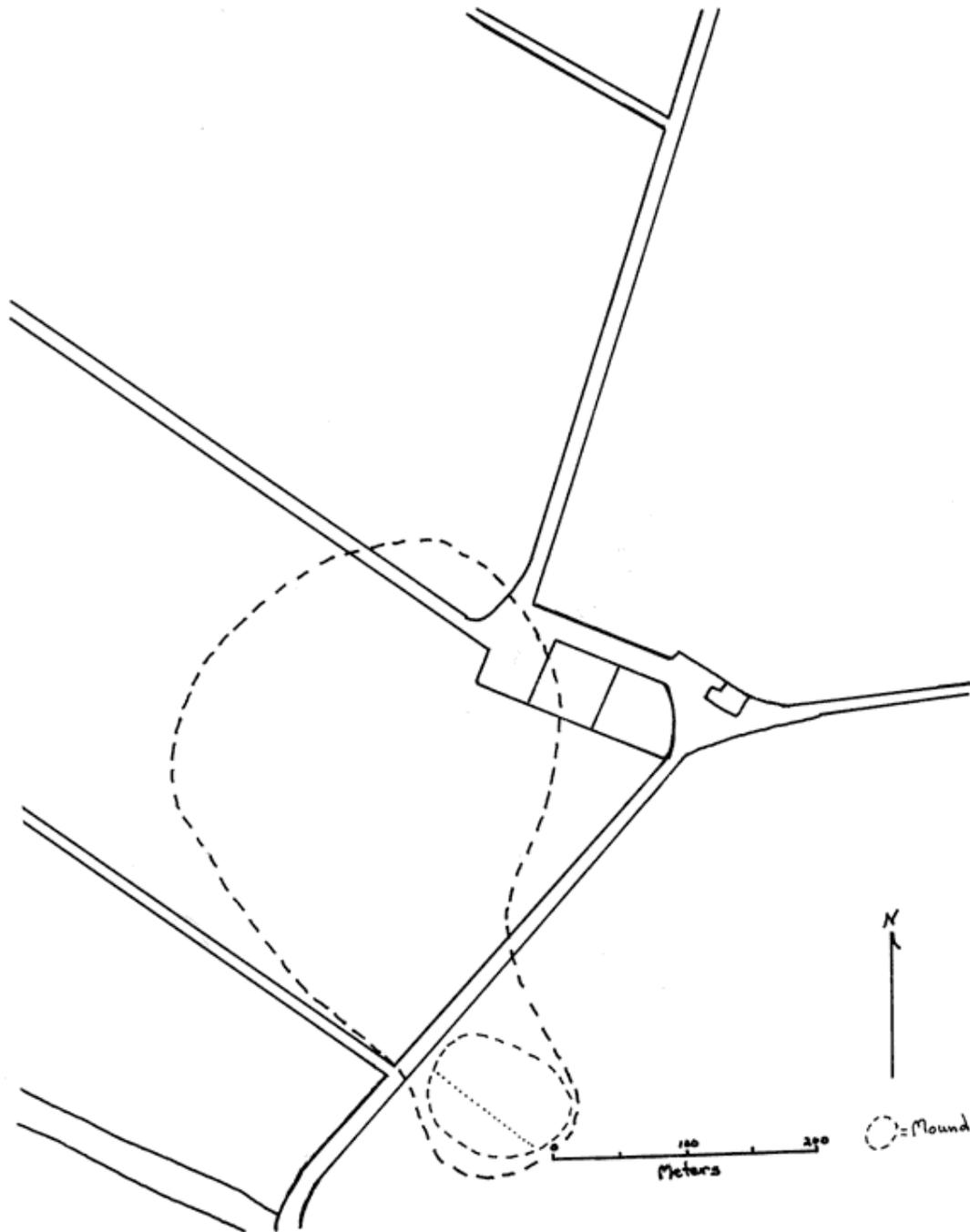


Figure 6. Teotihuacán Occupation, San Marcos Site (large enclosed area dashed lines) with "Apartment Compound" Mound (small enclosed area dashed lines).

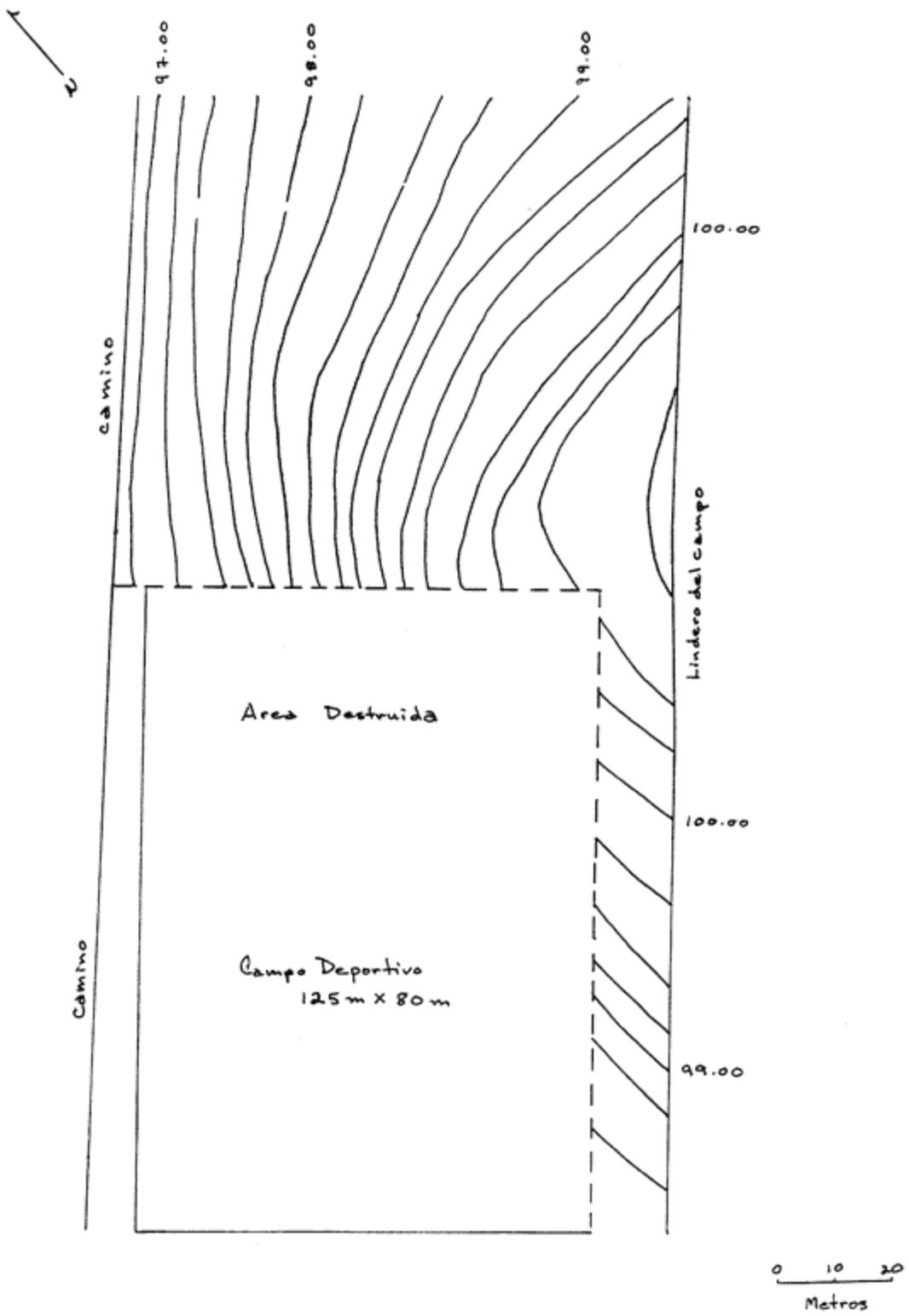


Figure 7. Partially Destroyed "Apartment Compound" Mound at the San Marcos Site.



**Plate 2. San Marcos Site, Teotihuacán Period "Apartment Compound".**

### *Excavations*

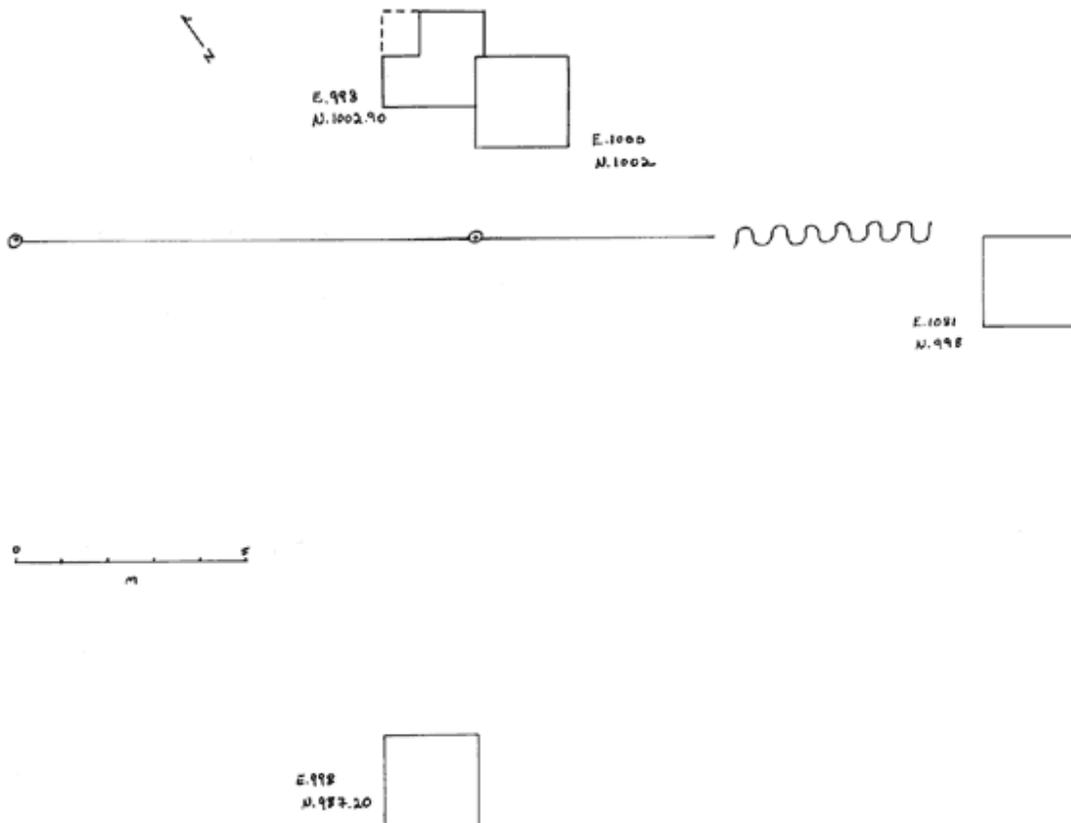
We excavated 3 test pits ([Figure 6](#) and [Figure 8](#)) within the northern section of the nucleated center of the site in an area where we had encountered traces of stuccoed Teotihuacán period floors exposed in profile by a road cut and associated with dense concentrations of Teotihuacán period ceramics. In addition we excavated a fourth test pit to the east. We recovered the sequence of occupation of the site through these excavations and ascertained that there had been many recent modifications in the top 60-70 cm of the ground through bull-dozing, chisel ploughing, and illicit excavations. Nevertheless there still are structural remains below this zone which have not been modified.

In one pit ([Figure 9](#); [Plate 3](#)) we located a Teotihuacán period wall of stone and mud mortar, with an orientation 15 degrees east of north, very similar to that in the urban center. Associated with the wall were remnants of tezontle floors placed on clay. The ceramics indicate that the first occupation of the site occurred during the first centuries after the development of Teotihuacán and that it continued until Late Xolalpan/Metepec.

There is no evidence of any prehispanic occupation between the fall of Teotihuacán and the rise of Tula. The Toltec occupation (Mazapan phase) occurs above the Teotihuacán wall, and in the other two test pits found in the nucleated zone. It also occurs on the surface of the site with an extent of about 40 ha and is associated with the exploitation of the nearby Otumba obsidian source for the production of bifaces. In the southernmost pit ([Figure 8](#); [Plate 5](#)) we found a Mazapan platform (low) constructed with yellow clay placed over a stone fill.

The excavations revealed fragments of Mazapan floors made of stone in mud mortar and of compacted dirt and mud mortar almost immediately above the Teotihuacán floors. We found some human bones within the pit with the Teotihuacán wall and floors and extended the excavation to recover them ([Figure 10](#); [Plate 4](#)). The skeleton was of a young female adult with a Mazapan Wavy Line Red-on-Buff Bowl as an offering.

Although we encountered Aztec ceramics on the surface of the Aztec period site (ca. 48 ha) with numerous residential and public structures as well as evidence for the continued production of bifaces and the addition of prismatic core-blade production (primarily in Pachuca obsidian but with some Otumba) we encountered only one Aztec structure in our test pits ([Figure 11](#); [Plate 6](#)). This consisted of the foundation stones of a large structure placed on top of a floor of pounded earth placed over tepetate.



**Figure 8. Excavations, San Marcos Site.**

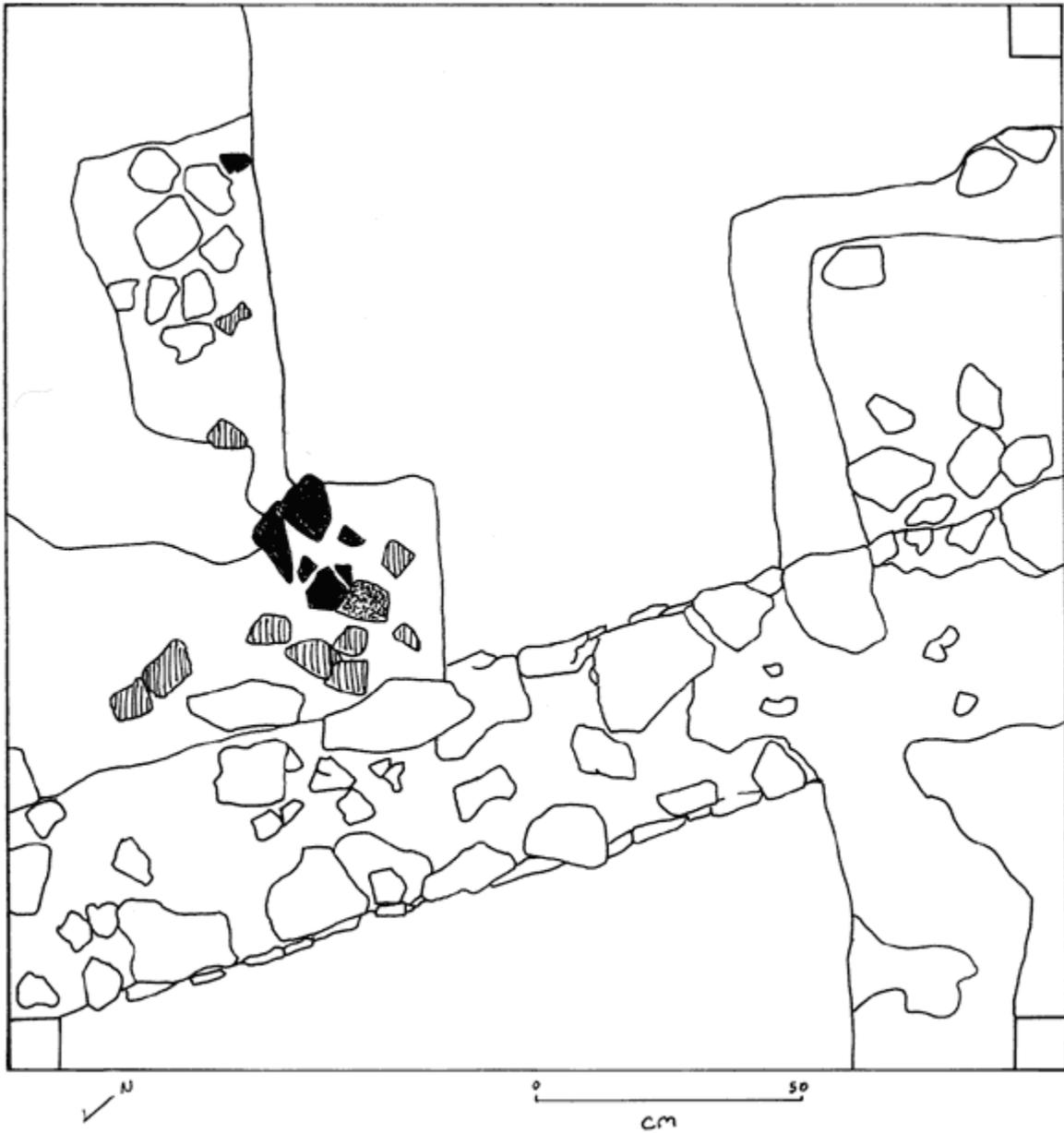


Figure 9. Exposed Teotihuacán Period Wall and Floors, E1000-N1002, San Marcos.



**Plate 3. San Marcos Site, Teotihuacán Wall.**



Plate 4. San Marcos Site, Mazapan Period Burial.



**Plate 5. San Marcos Site, Mazapan Period Platform.**



**Plate 6. San Marcos Site, Aztec Period Structure, Foundations, and Floor.**

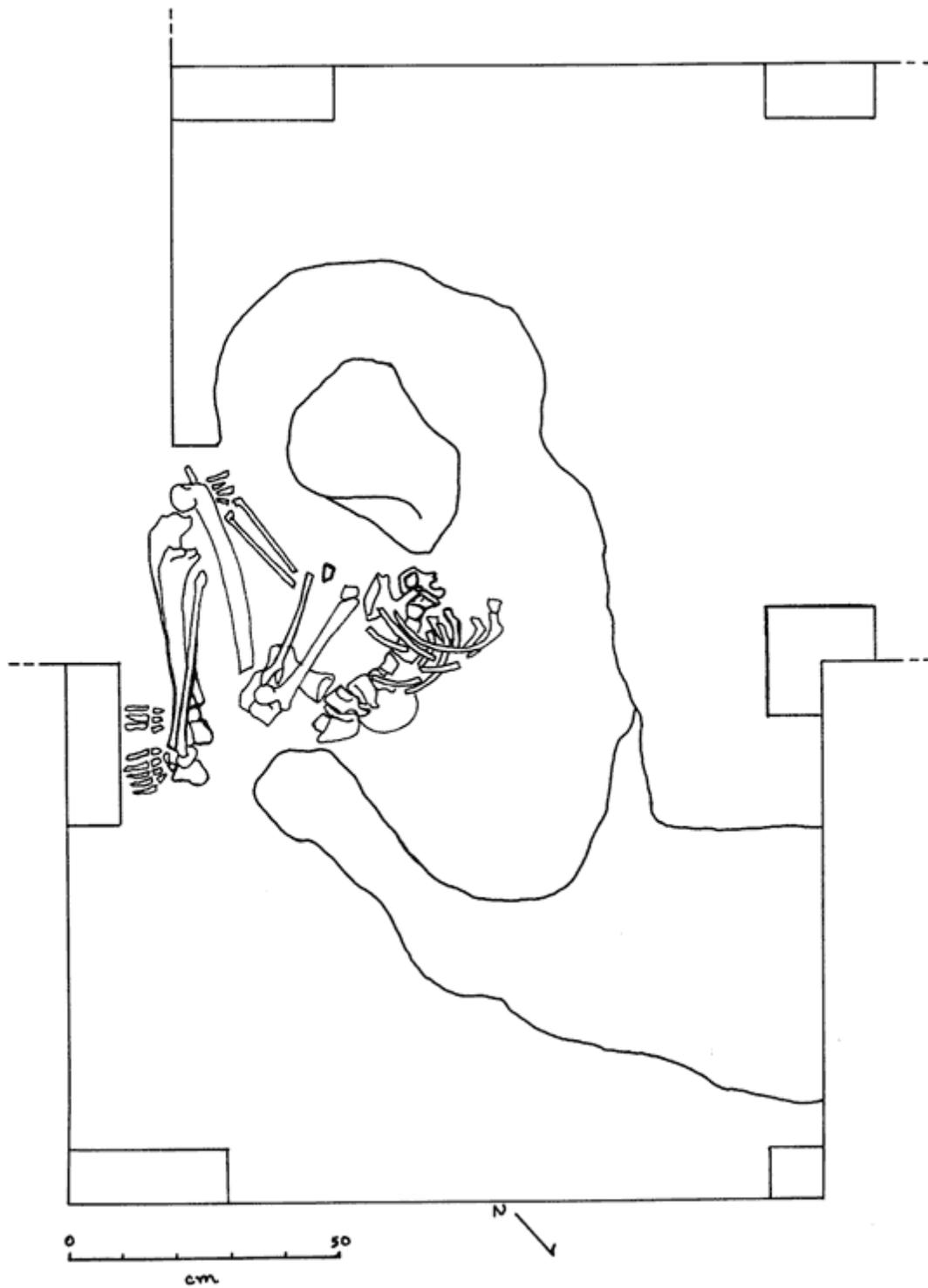


Figure 10. Exposed Mazapan Burial, E998-N1002.90, San Marcos.

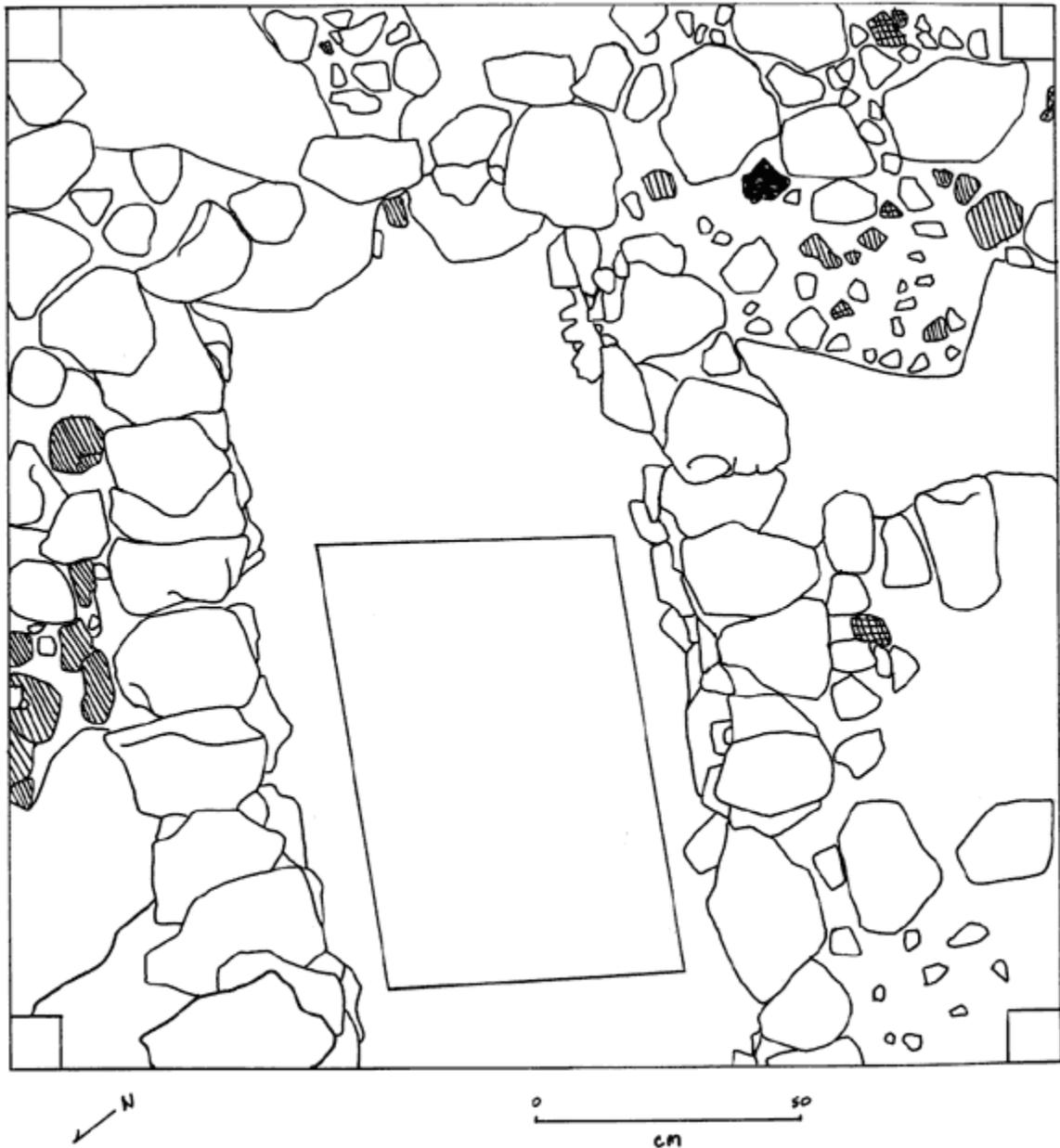


Figure 11. Exposed Aztec Period Mound Foundations, Floor, and Exploratory Pit, E1081-N998, San Marcos.

TC-87-89 [15 Ha.]

### *Surveys and Surface Collections*

This site is situated at the eastern end of the East Avenue extended from Teotihuacán and linked to a trade route to Calpulalpan and points east and south, over which we know Thin Orange ceramics from Puebla were transported to Teotihuacán ([Figure 1](#) and [Figure 12](#)) (Charlton, 1987). The surface surveys indicated that although there had been severe disturbances to the site as a result of heavy agricultural equipment, there still existed a nucleated center within the site with adequate preservation for future investigations. We suspect that the modifications removed up to a meter or more of structural remains and associated deposits from the last occupations of the Teotihuacán period and those of the succeeding Mazapan, Aztec, Colonial, and Republican periods. The road cut exposed in profile some stuccoed floors of tezontle and some walls of stone with mud mortar.

The survey results were plotted with reference to Sanders' original plan (1996:Fig. 200). The site boundary marks the Teotihuacán period site as defined by surface concentrations of ceramics and identifiable mounds (T). Colonial (C) and Aztec (A) mounds are also noted. The survey revealed that the majority of the mounds located by Sanders' Teotihuacán Valley Project in the zones of TA-87, TA-88, and TA-89, have been destroyed through agricultural intensification involving bull-dozing and terrace building. This is especially so in the northern area of the site. In the area south of the new road, however, a zone which is now in nopales and which, although modified, has not suffered complete destruction – probably because of the heavy construction in this area – there remains a zone with relatively deep deposits with several phases of construction of Teotihuacán structures.

We suspect that in this area the agricultural modifications of the site area involved the removal of the final Teotihuacán period occupations as well as those of the Mazapan, Aztec, Colonial, and Republican periods during terrace construction. There was probably a meter of archaeological deposits removed at that time. The survey and the excavations in this southern area suggest that both large and small houses may still be present and still well enough preserved to be excavated to evaluate their orientation and internal structure.

### *Excavations*

We excavated four test pits within the preserved core area of the site ([Figure 12](#) and [Figure 13](#)). These revealed the extensive modifications by heavy agricultural equipment noted previously in the surface surveys reaching depths varying between 20 and 60 cm. One test pit revealed a deep midden deposit. The other three encountered structural remains. One of these ([Figure 14](#); [Plate 7](#)) has a stuccoed tezontle low talud and floor constructed immediately above a prepared floor of tepetate. The other structures encountered were of two buildings, one built on top of the other which had been

dismantled ([Figure 15](#); [Plate 8](#) and [Plate 9](#)). The floor in the upper structure was of pounded tepetate. In the three buildings the walls show an orientation between 18 and 21 degrees east of north with widths between 60 and 90 cm. The sections of the residential complexes exposed – residential due to the association of domestic ceramics and faunal remains – appear to be quite similar to those of the "apartment compound" in the urban center of Teotihuacán.

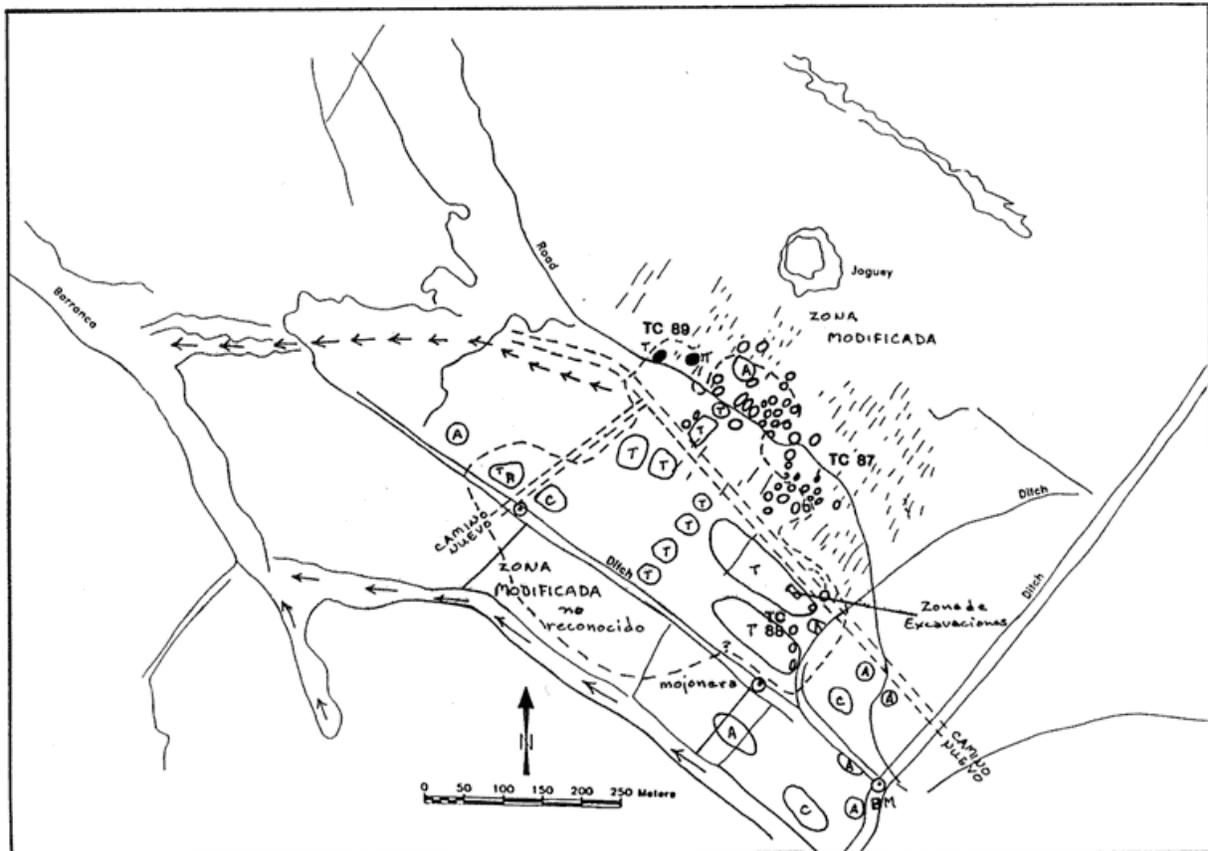


Figure 12. TC-87-89, Site Boundaries and Mounds from 1998-99 Surveys, Collections; Excavations Noted (after Sanders 1996, Fig. 200).

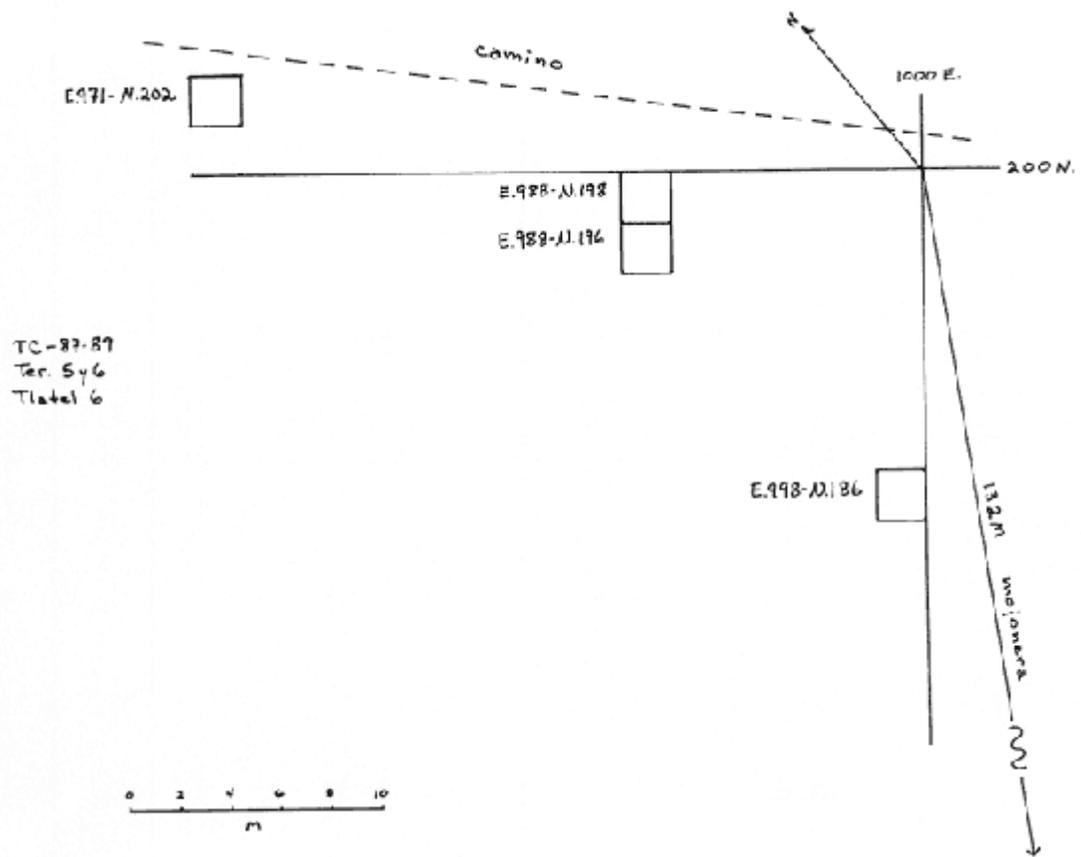


Figure 13. TC-87-89, Excavations, 1998-99.

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E.971-N.202

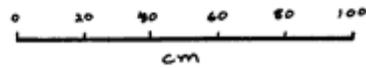
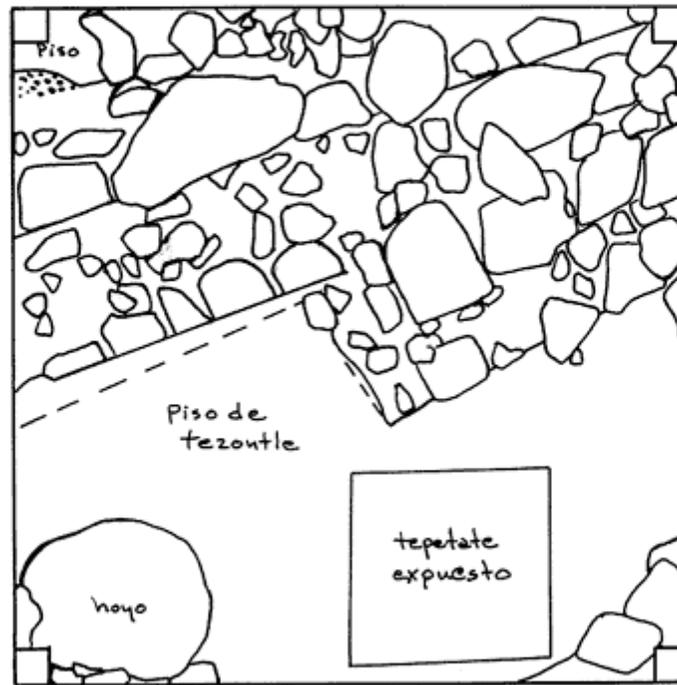


Figure 14. TC-87-89, Excavated Structural Remnant with Stuccoed Floor and Low Stuccoed Talud; Exploratory Pit Through Floor to Tepetate; E971-N202.

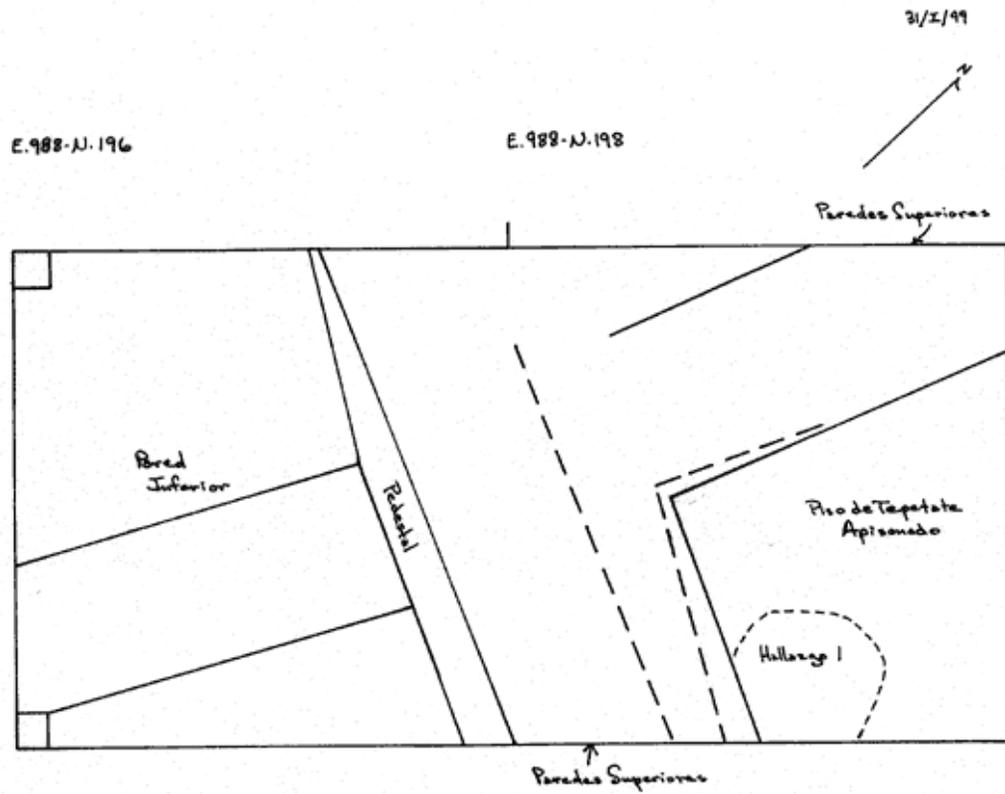


Figure 15. TC-87-89, Excavated Superimposed Structures; Floor of Hard Packed Tepetate with Intrusive Pit; E988-N196 and E988-N198.



Plate 7. TC-87-89, Teotihuacán Period Structure with stuccoed Talud and Floor.



**Plate 8. TC-87-89, Teotihuacán Period Lower Structure.**



**Plate 9. TC-87-89, Teotihuacán Period Upper Structure with compacted Tepetate Floor.**

## Initial Conclusions

1. Although all Teotihuacán period sites in the eastern Teotihuacán Valley and in the area north of Cerro Gordo have been severely modified and in some cases completely destroyed by agricultural intensification, pitting, and road building, many still retain sufficient archaeological integrity to sustain later more extensive investigations. These investigations should not be delayed too long, however, as destruction is inexorably on-going.
2. All of the Teotihuacán period sites investigated in this pilot project have residential remains of various sizes, including "apartment compounds" as well as smaller structures. Although the surface remains are not definitive the excavations indicate that "apartment compounds" are present.
3. Where we have excavation data the wall orientations with reference to true north vary, being similar to Teotihuacán in two sites in the eastern Teotihuacán Valley, San Marcos and TC-87-89, where they are between 15 and 21 degrees to the east of north. In two sites to the north of Cerro Gordo the orientations are somewhat more divergent. That of the excavated structure in TC-46 (Charlton, 1994) is slightly more than 24 degrees east of north; that in the wall exposed in TC-73, mound 18-41, 13 degrees west of north (projecting a north-south wall at 90 degrees from the east west exposed wall).
4. Where we have excavation data, the construction techniques and materials used are similar but by no means identical to those present at the urban center. In addition the substantial reconstructions which occur at Teotihuacán leaving numerous superimposed floors do not seem to be present among the rural excavated structures. It must be noted, however, that some later constructions were removed through agricultural modifications in some sites.
5. The surface surveys and surface collections, along with the excavated materials indicate that the ceramic complex is similar to that at Teotihuacán. The time range of construction seems to be subsequent to the establishment of Teotihuacán, probably during the Early Tlamimilolpa period, with occupation continuing to Late Xolalpan/Metepec.
6. No mural paintings, fragmentary or otherwise were encountered.
7. It is not possible to determine site plan presence and orientation using surface survey results alone due to the extreme modifications of all sites. Selected excavations are necessary.
8. Site functions are still elusive although TC-87-89 seems to have become more heavily involved in Thin Orange Trade through time.

## Future Plans

Given the results of this project we plan to apply for additional funds from other sources to continue these investigations.

## Acknowledgements

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