Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos
Ancient Peoples of Southern Mexico
Arthur A. Joyce
Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos
The Peoples of America

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To Christine
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Preface

The coastal and highland valleys as well as the rugged mountains of the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca are today one of the most linguistically and ethnically diverse areas of the Americas. Archaeological research has shown that this present cultural diversity extends far back into the prehispanic era. In this book I synthesize archaeological, ethnohistoric, ethnographic, iconographic, and epigraphic evidence to trace the prehispanic history of three of Oaxaca’s ethnolinguistic groups: the Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos. These groups occupy much of what is now the western half of Oaxaca, and their prehispanic past is better known than that of other Oaxacan peoples. Archaeological research on the Mixtecs and Zapotecs began in the late nineteenth century and has continued as a major research focus in Mesoamerican archaeology up to the present day. Intensive research on the Chatinos of the southwestern coastal region of Oaxaca began in the mid-1980s and has been the focus of my field research beginning in 1986. This research shows that prehispanic Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos lived in socially complex societies with writing, cities, powerful rulers, elaborate architectural and artistic traditions, and sophisticated agricultural technologies. Their archaeology addresses many key research problems such as the origins of agriculture, the development of social complexity, ancient urbanism, and societal collapse, among many others.

My approach to Oaxaca is based on a consideration of contemporary social theory and reflects the current trend in archaeology toward theoretical perspectives drawn from poststructural, feminist, and subaltern theories. Because my approach to Oaxacan archaeology differs from most of the current research in the region, I have described my theoretical perspective in some detail. This makes Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos more heavily theorized than other books on ancient Oaxaca, but I have tried to discuss theory in an accessible manner that will make the book of interest to advanced undergraduates as well as graduate students and professionals. While theory can be daunting for students, it is essential because our understandings
of the past are dependent on our theoretical frameworks. Making theory explicit is therefore crucial. I have also tried to discuss the many differences of opinion and debates in Oaxacan archaeology in an inclusive and fair-minded fashion, even when I disagree with my colleagues. I feel strongly that debate can produce productive tensions that drive research, but I also think that debate in Oaxaca has not always been of this productive kind. I hope that this book opens up dialog and constructive engagements on Oaxaca’s ancient past.

Like most archaeological interpretations, my arguments are based on fragmentary evidence and analogy, as well as on theoretical positions that will undoubtedly evolve with time. Certainly my own perspectives have changed over the years (e.g., A. Joyce 1991a; Joyce & Winter 1996), and the nature of archaeology as a science is such that we deceive only ourselves if we believe that a particular past is largely understood. In his discussion of the advantages of processual archaeology relative to earlier cultural historical approaches, Kent Flannery (1967:122) argued that “The process theorists assume that ‘truth’ is just the best current hypothesis, and that whatever they believe now will ultimately be proved wrong, either within their lifetime or afterward. Their ‘theories’ are not like children to them, they suffer less trauma when the theories prove ‘wrong.’ ” I heartily agree with Flannery’s insights here and it is sage advice for archaeologists of any theoretical persuasion. Respectful differences of opinion yield productive tensions that drive research and hopefully our understanding of past people.

Many people and institutions have supported me as I carried out the research discussed in this book and as I wrote the book itself. There have been numerous people who have aided me through years and while I cannot hope to mention everyone here, there are some that deserve special recognition.

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Preface

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In early 1522, a few months after conquering the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, Hernán Cortés dispatched an army led by Pedro de Alvarado to the Mixtec city of Tututepec on the Pacific coast of the present-day southern Mexican state of Oaxaca (figure 1.1). Since the city’s founding in
the late eleventh century by the legendary ruler, Lord 8 Deer “Jaguar Claw,” Tututepec had been the political capital of one of the most powerful polities in Mexico (Joyce et al. 2004). By the time of the arrival of the Spanish, Tututepec dominated an empire covering 20,000 km² along the southern Pacific coast. The city was located in the foothills of the Sierra Madre del Sur mountain range only 15 km north of the Pacific Ocean (figure 1.2). From the city center, people looked down onto the lush agricultural fields of the coastal plain, to the estuaries and out onto the vast blue of the Pacific. The ruler or cacique of Tututepec controlled much of the wealth of this land, which early colonial-period Spanish documents tell us included minerals such as gold and copper; agricultural fields for the production of cotton and cacao; and coastal resources like pearls, salt, and fish. Cortés had heard of this rich and powerful Mixtec city from Lord Lachi, the Zapotec ruler of Tehuantepc, a traditional enemy of Tututepec, and offered an alliance with the Spanish to defeat the Mixtec Empire.

Figure 1.2  Photo of Tututepec showing the colonial church and the sacred hill of Yucu Dzaa (photograph by Arthur A. Joyce)
In February of 1522, Alvarado arrived in Tututepec with 200 Spanish soldiers and an army of thousands of Zapotecs from Tehuantepec. In describing Alvarado’s arrival in the coastal city, Díaz del Castillo (1955:101–2) stated that “they were taken to reside in the most populated part of the town, where the ruler had his altars and his largest houses, and where the houses were very close together, and made of thatch . . .” [translation by the author]. Alvarado conquered Tututepec in early March and imprisoned the ruler, Lord Coaxintecuhtli, who was forced to turn over thousands of castellanos of gold until his death in prison. After the conquest of the south coast, Cortés ordered Alvarado to establish a town near Tututepec, which became Villa Segura de la Frontera, the second municipality in New Spain. The settlement lasted less than one year. Unhappy with the hot climate and the ravages of disease, the Spanish settlers left for Antequera in the highlands, which later became Oaxaca City.

Oppression and epidemics rapidly decimated the coastal population. A major smallpox epidemic swept through the region in 1534, followed by measles in 1544. The population of the Tututepec Empire at the time of the conquest has been estimated at more than 250,000, yet only an estimated 4,500 people were recorded at Tututepec in the census of 1544 (Dahlgren 1990:42). Spanish friars and administrators began the suppression of indigenous religion and the conversion of people to Catholicism.

The Spanish Conquest of Mesoamerica is often portrayed as a profound historical rupture disconnecting indigenous peoples from their prehispanic history and culture. The colonial history of Mesoamerica is viewed as driven by forces beyond the control of indigenous people, such as disease and the religious, social, and economic changes imposed by the Spanish colonial authorities. Yet recent studies (e.g., Gruzinski 1989; Terraciano 2001) increasingly recognize indigenous people as active players in colonial history and show that important continuities exist from the prehispanic past up to the present day. Although Native Americans were at a disadvantage, especially due to the devastation suffered because of epidemics, indigenous people creatively incorporated elements of European culture into daily practice and at times actively resisted Spanish authorities.

In the region of Tututepec, for example, Mixtecs rose up in revolt against the Spaniards in 1523 and later in 1694. While these rebellions were unsuccessful, colonial authorities had only limited success in acculturating native peoples. The prehispanic past remained in the social memory of the people of Tututepec. In 1717, the native ruler presented the Codex Colombino, a late prehispanic historical manuscript, as evidence in a court case to establish the boundaries of the region under Tututepec’s control. In the 1990s and 2000s, the people of Tututepec worked together to build
a community museum as a place to preserve and celebrate the history of the town with a focus on the prehispanic past. Despite difficulties in raising funds, and a major earthquake that destroyed parts of the town, the community worked with federal and state authorities to build and organize the museum, which was dedicated in 2004. I have come to know several of the community leaders involved in the museum project and have seen how their dedication, hard work, and desire to celebrate their rich history has resulted in the construction of the museum, which draws their past into the present and future, becoming an anchor for social memory and community identity. Rather than being solely at the mercy of distant forces, the native peoples of Oaxaca – Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Chatinos, and others – have been active participants in their histories both before and after the conquest.

This book examines the archaeology and history of the Central Valleys and the Mixtec highlands and coast of Oaxaca, which were inhabited by Mixtec, Zapotec, Chatino, and related peoples through the prehispanic period. I focus on these regions of Oaxaca because the indigenous groups that inhabited them were members of the Otomanguean language family and because these regions are the best understood archaeologically in Oaxaca. Archaeological research in these areas provides a rich picture of the impressive history and cultural achievements of ancient Oaxacan peoples. They were some of the first people in the Americas to domesticate plants and settle in permanent villages. Beginning at c.500 BC, some of Mesoamerica’s earliest urban centers were founded in Oaxaca, including the spectacular mountaintop city of Monte Albán in the Oaxaca Valley and the coastal city of Río Viejo with its massive acropolis and carved-stone portraits of rulers. The history of Oaxaca’s prehispanic ruling dynasties was recorded in the rich iconography of carved-stone monuments and painted murals. Oaxaca was where some of the earliest hieroglyphic writing in Mesoamerica has been discovered. The late prehispanic codices – painted screenfold manuscripts – record historical and religious narratives of the exploits of rulers and deities. Oaxaca’s archaeological record also provides some of the richest evidence of the lives of common people through the prehispanic era. Archaeologists have excavated the houses of farmers and craftspeople, discovered the stone tools they used to work their fields, prepare food, and hunt; the pottery used to cook, serve, and store food; and the incense burners and figurines used to contact ancestors and deities as well as evidence for mortuary rituals preserved in burials and cemeteries.

To understand the prehispanic past, I draw on archaeological evidence along with studies of indigenous texts, early colonial Spanish documents, and iconographic analyses of prehispanic imagery. Each of these sources
of data show that the prehispanic Mixtec, Zapotec, and Chatino peoples shared a history of interaction including cultural interchange, trade, warfare, alliance, intermarriage, and migration. By the time of the Spanish Conquest, for example, the degree of interaction and intermarriage created a shared noble identity that cut across ethnolinguistic differences. Common people also interacted across regions through participation in markets that brought together people from great distances as well as through warfare and migration. The history of the Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos is therefore a shared history, although as discussed throughout the book the nature of these interactions changed through time and archaeologists have debated their significance in understanding culture change.

Sources of Evidence

Scholars are fortunate to have available a variety of complementary sources of information on prehispanic Oaxaca, including research in archaeology, ethnohistory, ethnography, and linguistics. The most important source of data for most of the prehispanic period comes from the archaeological record. Oaxaca has been a focus of archaeological research since the late nineteenth century and over the last half-century has been the locus of some of the most influential projects addressing problems such as the origins and development of agriculture, early village life, urbanism, and social complexity (figure 1.3).

Archaeological research involves the reconstruction of the past through the study of material culture recovered through systematic survey, excavation, and laboratory studies. Of course, archaeological evidence cannot tell us directly about the lives, activities, and accomplishments of past peoples. Archaeologists use analogies drawn from the present as well as indigenous and Spanish written accounts of life during the prehispanic and early colonial periods to interpret the archaeological evidence in terms of past practices, beliefs, and social institutions (see Stahl 1993; Wylie 1985).

The research of ethnographers and linguists who study the indigenous peoples of present-day Oaxaca shows that, despite the profound disruptions of the Spanish Conquest, prehispanic traditions and social memories continue to shape the lives and understandings of indigenous communities. Research on living peoples is important for gaining insights into indigenous practices and systems of meaning, involving religion, cosmology, and agriculture. Archaeologists must be cautious in uncritically using ethnographic evidence for interpreting the archaeological record, however, due to the dramatic changes that occurred in indigenous culture over the last 500 years.
The use of ethnographic information can be justified if there are historical sources that allow scholars to trace meanings and practices back to the time of initial encounters between Native Americans and Europeans and further back into the prehispanic period. Fortunately, Oaxaca has a rich ethnohistoric record that can strengthen analogies used in interpreting the archaeological record and, in the case of prehispanic writing systems, provide direct accounts of prehispanic life.

Ethnohistoric sources include Spanish and indigenous documents that provide information on native peoples and culture from the time of the Spanish Conquest up to the present. It is important to recognize, however, that colonial-period Spanish descriptions of indigenous society must be viewed critically with the goals and perspectives of European writers taken into account. A more significant source of observations on colonial-period culture comes from the writings of indigenous scholars recorded in both indigenous alphabetic and pictorial writing. These documents include a number

**Figure 1.3** The Mexican state of Oaxaca showing geographical regions, rivers, and mountain ranges (drawing by Eric Berkemeyer)
of maps (*mapas*), some painted on cloth (*lienzos*), that record community boundaries as well as genealogical records of ruling families, some of which extend back centuries into the prehispanic period. The *lienzos* and *mapas* make direct historical connections between the colonial period and a series of late prehispanic screenfold books, or codices, written on deer hide in the prehispanic Mixtec pictographic writing system.

The codices are immensely important documents because they record Mixtec religious and historical texts from before the Spanish Conquest. Though only portions of eight codices in prehispanic style survived destruction, this corpus represents the largest number of preconquest documents from anywhere in Mesoamerica. The histories recorded in the codices date back to the tenth century so that, in combination with early colonial documents like the *lienzos* and contemporary ethnography, scholars have a continuous written and oral record of indigenous culture dating back more than a millennium. Still earlier written inscriptions on stone, painted murals, and a variety of portable artifacts extend indigenous texts back more than two millennia, although the prehispanic writing systems that predate the codices are only beginning to be deciphered (Urcid 2001). One bias present in all of these ethnohistoric sources – early colonial Spanish and indigenous documents as well as prehispanic writing – is that they were all authored almost exclusively by social elites, primarily male, with little mention of the lives of common people.

The combination of ethnohistory, archaeology, ethnography, and linguistics provides scholars of prehispanic Oaxaca with multiple, complementary datasets that can be used to examine the history of ancient Oaxacan peoples. In the remainder of this chapter I review the history of research dealing with each of these sources of evidence.

**Ethnohistory**

The earliest interest in Mixtec, Zapotec, and Chatino culture by Europeans dates to the early colonial period and includes a diverse range of documents that were part of the Spanish program of conquest and colonization (Terraciano 2001:21–31, 67–71). Information collected by Spanish religious and political authorities in the sixteenth century includes the *Relaciones Geográficas*, legal documents, and several dictionaries and grammars of native languages recorded by Dominican friars. The *Relaciones Geográficas* were compiled toward the end of the sixteenth century by order of King Phillip II of Spain and consisted of a long series of questions put to indigenous nobles, including some that pertained to people’s memories of the preconquest era. Dictionaries and grammars were compiled to aid in the conversion of natives
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to Catholicism and have proven to be valuable sources of information on indigenous worldview and language at the time of the conquest. The most important linguistic sources of the sixteenth century included the works of Fray Francisco de Alvarado ([1593] 1962) and Fray Antonio de los Reyes ([1593] 1976) for Mixtec and Fray Juan de Córdova for Zapotec ([1570] 1989). Legal documents record a wide array of information including translations of native-language documents and trial records. One of the most important sources of evidence on contact-period Mixtec religious belief and practice comes from the records of the famous Inquisitorial investigations at the town of Yauhuitlán in the Mixteca Alta region (Hamann 2008a).

Writings on indigenous culture by Spanish scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are not as useful as those of the early colonial period. The works of chroniclers and official historians, particularly the two-volume history of Fray Francisco de Burgoa ([1674] 1989), often do not distinguish sources of data and intersperse stories and legends of prehispanic Oaxaca with Biblical references. Other colonial-period chroniclers, including Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, and Fray Diego Dúran, mention Oaxaca, but are more important as sources of data on life in other parts of Mexico.

Although colonial-period Spanish accounts of indigenous culture and history have proven to be useful, Oaxaca also has a rich record of indigenous documents from late prehispanic times into the colonial period. The most significant documents dealing with prehispanic religion and history are the Mixtec codices. While there were probably hundreds if not thousands of codices, only a handful survived the Spanish Conquest and most are now housed in European museums. Several of the Mixtec codices were painted prior to the Spanish Conquest (e.g., the codices Vienna, Zouche-Nuttall, Selden, and Colombino-Becker). Other codices were painted in the first few decades after Spanish contact, but are rendered in prehispanic pictographic conventions with little evidence of European influences, and were probably copies of earlier ones. The extant codices are visually stunning manuscripts painted in polychrome and consist of texts that are largely religious in nature, including versions of the Mixtec creation story (Monaghan 1990), as well as indigenous historical narratives that deal with events from the tenth century up to the Spanish Conquest (Byland & Pohl 1994; Jansen & Pérez 2005, 2007; Troike 1974).

A variety of early colonial pictographic and alphabetic documents in native languages exhibit the influence of Spanish colonization and in some instances may have involved collaborations of Spanish administrators and indigenous scribes. Although these documents reflect indigenous people's
encounters with the Spanish, they are still authored from a native perspective and, particularly in the case of sixteenth-century examples, demonstrate strong continuities with prehispanic writing and modes of representation, including the use of the prehispanic calendrical system (Terraciano 2001:15–65). These documents include the lienzos and mapas as well as a number of early colonial “codices.” Colonial-period codices differ from those in prehispanic style in that they show a juxtaposition of native and European conventions and are executed in ink on Spanish paper. Many of the earliest colonial documents were largely pictographic with alphabetic glosses, although the transition from pictographic to alphabetic writing was well under way by the latter half of the sixteenth century (Terraciano 2001:48–65). By this time native scribes were taking over the role of recording legal documents often in indigenous languages and, increasingly through the colonial period, in Spanish.

The modern study of Mixtec, Zapotec, and Chatino ethnohistory began in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Castellanos 1989; Gay 1881; Seler 1904, 1908; Martínez Gracida 1888). These works included general histories of Oaxaca that were often inconsistent in identifying sources of data and combined contemporary oral histories with the use of colonial-period documents, particularly Spanish-language ones. Several researchers, however, began the study of indigenous documents, including lienzos and codices (J. C. Clark 1912; Starr 1908).

The first major breakthroughs in the study of Oaxaca’s ethnohistory was the research of the famous Mexican archaeologist Alfonso Caso, who was a pioneer in both Oaxaca’s archaeology and studies of the Mixtec codices. Caso used the glosses and genealogies on several early colonial pictorial manuscripts, especially the Mapa de Teozacualco, as “Rosetta stones” to establish links to the prehispanic codices. His work demonstrated that the codices were from the Mixteca and showed that the histories represented in the codices continued for many centuries from the prehispanic era into the early colonial period (Caso 1949). Caso (1956, 1964, 1977, 1979) made important advances in decipherment of the codices and in understanding the prehispanic calendar along with his monumentally important archaeological research discussed below.

Beginning in the 1950s, Caso’s research drew a large number of ethnohistorians and archaeologists to Oaxaca. Important ethnohistoric studies since the mid-twentieth century include work on early colonial Mixtec (Dahlgren 1990; Cook & Borah 1968; Spores 1984; Terraciano 2001) and Zapotec (Chance 1978; Whitecotton 1977, 1990; J. Zeitlin 2005) culture and society. Relatively little work has been done on Chatino ethnohistory (Greenberg 1981:47–80) perhaps due to the remoteness of contemporary
Chatino communities and a relative scarcity of colonial-period archival records. Scholars have increasingly moved away from a reliance on the official histories of the Spanish colonial authorities and toward archival sources and indigenous documents. Another important development has been the increasing number of indigenous scholars working on Oaxacan ethnohistory (e.g., de la Cruz 2002; Jansen & Pérez 2005, 2007). Indigenous scholars address early colonial and contemporary culture with an intimate knowledge of their culture and a concern for correcting biases in Western scholarship. Major advances in the study of indigenous pictographic writing have built on Caso’s work and include Mary Elizabeth Smith (1973), Troike (1974), Byland and Pohl (1994), Pohl (1994), Jansen and Pérez (2007), and Monaghan (1990).

The recent advances in the study of Oaxacan ethnohistory provide a rich understanding of indigenous culture and social practices at the time of the Spanish Conquest. Ethnohistory gives us a crucial interpretive basis for understanding prehispanic culture, but it is ultimately the archaeological record that provides the bulk of the evidence on the prehispanic past.

Archaeology

The inspiring ruins of prehispanic communities like Monte Albán and Mitla have drawn scholars to Oaxaca for well over a century. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries scholars interested in the prehispanic past such as Guillermo Dupaix, Eduard Muhlenpfordt, Désirée Charnay, William Henry Holmes, and Eduard Seler visited the ruins of Monte Albán and Mitla, writing about the sites and speculating on their age and origins. The first archaeological work in Oaxaca was carried out in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Leopoldo Batres at Mitla and Monte Albán and by Marshall Saville at Mitla, Monte Albán, Xoxocotlán, and Cuilapan.

The first large-scale, scientific archaeology began in the 1930s with the research of Alfonso Caso at the ancient Zapotec city of Monte Albán. During this period, the Mexican government began sponsoring archaeological projects to explore the prehispanic past and develop sites for tourism. In the 1920s, Caso began research on carved-stone monuments and in late 1931 began major excavations at Monte Albán. With the discovery in early 1932 of Tomb 7, one of the richest burials ever found in the Americas, Monte Albán burst onto the world stage. Caso continued fieldwork at Monte Albán with his colleagues Ignacio Bernal and Jorge Acosta until 1958 (Caso 1942, 1969; Caso & Bernal 1952; Caso et al. 1967). The Monte Albán project focused on excavating and reconstructing the civic-ceremonial center in
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and around the Main Plaza, approximately 170 tombs were discovered, and stratigraphic excavations allowed for the development of a ceramic sequence for the Oaxaca Valley. Beginning in the late 1930s, Caso and his colleagues (e.g., Acosta & Romero 1992; Bernal 1948–9; Caso 1938) expanded their investigations into the Mixteca Alta north of the Valley of Oaxaca with excavations at prehispanic centers such as Yucuñudahuí, Coixtlahuaca, Huamelulpan, and Monte Negro. Caso and Rubín de la Borbolla (1936) excavated the late prehispanic ceremonial center of Mitla in the eastern Oaxaca Valley. Caso and his collaborators established that the region’s archaeological remains were the creations of the ancestors of Oaxaca’s living indigenous peoples. Their research outlined the culture history of the Oaxaca Valley and the Mixteca Alta from the founding of Monte Albán around 500 bc to the time of the Spanish Conquest and demonstrated that highland Oaxaca gave rise to some of the most impressive cities in prehispanic Mesoamerica.

By the 1950s and 1960s, Oaxaca began to attract an international group of archaeologists. Excavations were carried out in the ceremonial and elite precincts of sites like Dainzú, Mitla, Yagul, and Zaachila in the Oaxaca Valley (e.g., Bernal & Oliveros 1988; Bernal & Gamio 1974; Paddock 1966a). Bernal (1965) began a surface survey of sites in the Oaxaca Valley, while initial reconnaissance, survey, and testing projects were begun in the Mixteca Alta (Spores 1969, 1972), Mixteca Baja (Paddock 1968), Miahuatlán Valley (Brockington 1973), and along the Pacific coast of Oaxaca (Brockington et al. 1974; Wallrath 1967). Most of the studies mentioned above also began the development of regional ceramic sequences.

An important trend of the 1960s and 1970s was the application of the methods and theories of processual archaeology to the study of ancient Oaxaca. The focus of research shifted from elite centers and culture history to a regional perspective that stressed cultural evolution and human adaptation. Two major projects in the Valley of Oaxaca exemplified the theoretical shift: the Oaxaca Human Ecology Project, directed by Kent Flannery, and the Valley of Oaxaca Settlement Pattern Project, directed by Richard Blanton and Stephen Kowalewski. The Oaxaca Human Ecology Project focused on understanding Archaic- and Formative-period ecology and cultural change, including changes in household and community form, sociocultural complexity, and subsistence patterns, extending the archaeological record of Oaxaca back to the Early Holocene (Flannery 1976a, 1986). Flannery and his collaborators developed a number of influential models dealing with the origins of agriculture, early village life, and the emergence of social complexity. The Settlement Pattern Project included surface collections and mapping of visible architectural features over an impressive
2,150 km², or 95 percent of the Valley of Oaxaca (Blanton 1978; Kowalewski et al. 1989), and provided interpretations of changing settlement patterns, economic systems, and political organization.

Since the 1970s, systematic regional survey coverage has been extended to the Mixteca Alta (Balkansky et al. 2000; Byland & Pohl 1994; Kowalewski et al. 2009; Plunket 1983), Mixteca Baja (Rivera 1999), lower Río Verde Valley (Joyce et al. 2001), southern Isthmus of Tehuantepec (J. Zeitlin 1978), Ejuila Valley (Feinman & Nicholas 1990), Cuicatlán Cañada (Redmond 1983), Miahuatlán Valley (Markman 1981), Sola Valley (Balkansky 2002), and into the mountains between the Oaxaca and Nochixtlán Valleys (Drennan 1989; Finsten 1996). These studies make Oaxaca perhaps the most intensively surveyed area in the world.

Other major projects since the 1970s focused on the cultural evolution of Monte Albán both from the perspective of the site itself and from a regional and interregional perspective. Marcus Winter (1974) of the Oaxaca Regional Center of the Mexican Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) examined changes in household form and organization through excavation of residences. Since the 1980s periodic excavation and salvage projects by INAH archaeologists have continued at Monte Albán (González Licón 2003; Martínez López 1998). In the eastern arm of the Oaxaca Valley, the Institute of Oaxacan Studies surveyed and excavated several high-status residences at Lambityeco to explore social developments during the collapse of Monte Albán at the end of the Classic period (Lind 2008; Lind & Urcid 1983; Paddock 1983). Spencer and Redmond (2001, 2004) examined the impact of Monte Albán on sites in the area of San Martín Tilcajete, finding evidence for conquest by Monte Albán at the end of the Formative period.

Interaction with Monte Albán, including the possibility of conquest, has been a major research question outside the Valley of Oaxaca. Research throughout the Oaxacan interior (e.g., Balkansky 2002; Feinman & Nicholas 1990; Spencer 1982) and along the Pacific coast (A. Joyce 1991a; Workinger 2002; R. Zeitlin 1990) has led to a major debate with some scholars arguing that Monte Albán dominated an empire extending over 20,000 km² (Marcus & Flannery 1996), while others maintain that evidence supports a more limited area of political domination (A. Joyce 2003; Workinger & Joyce n.d.; Zeitlin & Joyce 1999).

Beginning in the 1970s, the INAH sponsored a series of large-scale projects directed by Marcus Winter that focused on major Formative- and Classic-period urban centers in highland Oaxaca, including Yucuita and Huamelulpan in the Mixteca Alta and Cerro de las Minas in the Mixteca Baja. Like the earlier Monte Albán project, these investigations focused on