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THE MEANING AND USAGE OF THE MEXICAN PLACE-NAME "CHINANTLA"

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I. INTRODUCTION

THERE are probably few geographical names more important to the historical botany of southeastern Mexico than *Chinantla*. Yet this name has very often been misunderstood and has been used in a variety of senses. In view of this misunderstanding and of the importance to botanists of an exact definition of *Chinantla*, and in response to several queries from botanical workers, it has seemed advisable to present the following notes.

About a century ago, a number of enthusiastic European botanical explorers penetrated the rain-forested mountains of northeastern Oaxaca and brought out thousands of specimens of plants. Several of these botanists carried on extensive explorations in that part of Oaxaca known locally as *La Chinantla*, a region which can be stated roughly to comprise the northern half of the District of Choapam, the northeastern edge of the adjacent District of Villa Alta, and the southernmost edge of the District of Tuxtepec.

The Chinantla is unquestionably the richest part of northeastern Oaxaca as it is the northernmost limit of the luxuriant Central American rain-forest flora. As a consequence, the collections of the early explorers of the

Chinantla proved to be exceedingly rich in new and rare plants, many of which have never been collected again. Some of these collections represent local endemics which have never been collected elsewhere, while others have since been found to be widespread tropical American species.

A large number of species have been based on types from the Chinantla. Some of these plants bear as a specific epithet an adjectival form of *Chinantla* (e. g. *Desmoncus chinantlensis* Liebm. ex Mart. and *Clidemia chinantlana* (Naud.) Triana). A few species which were first collected in the Chinantla have since become important economic or horticultural plants (e. g. *Monstera deliciosa* Liebm.).

The majority of these early collections are preserved in European herbaria, although duplicates of some of them are in American institutions, especially in the Gray Herbarium, the Herbarium of the Field Museum of Natural History, and the United States National Herbarium. With the growing interest among American botanists in the flora of Central America, it is becoming increasingly evident that these early collections from northeastern Oaxaca (including those from the Chinantla) must be consulted. Since the historical material in European herbaria is periodically unavailable to American students, it is desirable that the localities of the early collectors be revisited and that toponymical material be collected.

Recently, in a number of floristic and monographic publications, critical specimens from Oaxaca labelled "Chinantla" have been erroneously assigned to other parts of Mexico. For example, very frequently botanists allocate such specimens to the State of Puebla instead of to the State of Oaxaca. The reason for this error is probably due to the fact that the term *Chinantla* is not

to be found on standard maps of Oaxaca, while recent maps of Puebla bear conspicuously the name of the town of Chinautla. *Chinantla* refers to a rain-forested mountainous region, whereas *Chinautla* refers apparently to a dry, plateau region. The resulting errors in floristic studies are often grave.

Further uncertainty is occasioned by the variety of meanings which the convenient term *Chinantla* has assumed at the hands of botanical, anthropological and historical writers.

Although in several papers (27, 29, 30) incidental reference has been made to the meaning of *Chinantla*, a more complete review of the history of the term with special reference to its botanical usage and significance may be helpful in clarifying the problem.

II. USE BY HISTORIANS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS

The word *Chinantla* has its etymological origin in the Aztec word *chinamitl*, signifying "an enclosed space". It is believed that the name *Chinantla* originally referred to a single settlement or town probably slightly south of the present village of San Juan Valle Nacional (long. $96^{\circ}20'$, lat. $17^{\circ}48'$) in the District of Tuxtepec. At the time of the Conquest, however, the name was used to designate an area which included a town called *Chinantla* and a number of dependent hamlets as well. Recent attempts have been made to identify the town of Chinantla with ruins of a *pueblo viejo* which have been found on the southern side of the Río Valle Nacional between San Mateo Yetla (long. $96^{\circ}24'$, lat. $17^{\circ}45'$) and San Juan Valle Nacional (15).

The *Relación de Chinantla* (12), an excellent English translation of which has been prepared by Bevan (2), was written in the town of Chinantla in November 1579. It is clearly set forth in the *Relación* that *Chinantla* referred

to four distinct entities in 1579: 1) an abandoned town; 2) a newer town nearby; 3) the area and villages surrounding this newer town; and 4) the river passing through the area (Río Valle Nacional).

In defining the *Chinantla*, the *Relación* stated: "The town of Chinantla is situated in a valley formed between two ranges of mountains . . . in such manner that one of these ranges extends along the northern side and the other along the southern side. The town lies on the banks of a swiftflowing river which they call Chinantla because it flows from a hill eleven leagues from here past a formerly inhabited village called Chinantla . . . Into this river empty four other large rivers, three of them above Chinantla and the other more than three leagues below the town. . . . It, (the town of Chinantla), has twenty-four villages surrounding it and possessing churches. It has four other settlements or hamlets which have no churches. . . . It is a very damp region and equally so is the cabecera and town of Chinantla; hot, humid, and unhealthy, so much so that at present it is abandoned, and there live in it only three Indians".

The *Relación* enumerated the villages comprising the region of which the new or second town of Chinantla was the capital. Many of these villages do not have recognizable names and may correspond to towns which (like Chinantla) are no longer in existence or to towns which are at present known by newer names. The following names are maintained: Cuasimulco, Santa María Jacatepec, San Pedro Ozumazín, San Juan Palantla, and San Mateo Yetla.

In summarizing the four original meanings of *Chinantla*, we may again quote from the *Relación*. "The town of Chinantla is called Chinantla because it is surrounded by towns and by mountains, and the natives call any kind of enclosed space chinamitl . . . as well as because it lies

on the banks of a swift-flowing river named Chinantla, rising eleven leagues from the town in a hill where was formerly situated a village named Chinantla, abandoned as the results of wars, and (finally) because the site was similar they called it, (the new town), Chinantla.” Each village of the region comprising the Chinantla had a lord who in turn “recognized the authority of the lord of the cabecera of Chinantla, and to him they paid tribute . . . and this lord recognized Moteçuma . . .”, who kept a garrison at the nearby town of San Juan Bautista Tuxtepec (long. $96^{\circ}07'$, lat. $18^{\circ}06'$).

The *Relación de Chinantla* was a governmental report, and its statements, though sometimes vague, are usually reliable. The *Relación* makes it clear that, in 1579, the term Chinantla referred in its widest sense to a region of northeastern Oaxaca which now comprises the southern edge of the District of Tuxtepec, the northern part of the District of Choapam, and the northeastern edge of the District of Villa Alta. This region is shaded on the map accompanying the present article. The *Relación* does not specify the southern limit of this area, but later usage seems to indicate that it was delimited by the southernmost Chinantec towns—San Juan Teotalcingo (long. $95^{\circ}58'$, lat. $17^{\circ}25'$) and Santo Domingo Latani (long. $95^{\circ}52'$, lat. $17^{\circ}23'$). We may assume that the Chinantla did not extend west beyond Cuasimulco because, in 1579, simultaneously with the *Relación de Chinantla*, a *Relación de Uçila* (26) was compiled. This *Relación de Uçila* pertained to the vicinity surrounding San Felipe Usila (long. $96^{\circ}34'$, lat. $17^{\circ}55'$) in the southwestern part of the District of Tuxtepec and immediately west of the Chinantla.

That Chinantla was a settlement of some importance in the early years after the Conquest is indicated by an old map which was published as a frontispiece in several

editions of Clavigero's *Historia* (7). This map, entitled *Anahuac or the Empire of Mexico, the Kingdom of Acolhuacan & Michuacan &c as they were in the year 1521*, has designated only a few towns in what is now the State of Oaxaca; one of these is Chinantla. The town is located in the "province" of Chinantla. Very near the town of Chinantla, the map designates a town called *Achiotlán* ("place of achiote"); this town either bears another name now or does not exist. It is of interest, however, to point out that in the vicinity of San Juan Valle Nacional, where the town of Chinantla probably existed, *achiote* (*Bixa Orellana* L.) abounds, whereas in the higher mountains to the south, this plant is less frequent.

We find a number of other writers referring incidentally to the Chinantla and using the name in its correct historical sense. In 1864, Orozco y Berra (25) stated that "La Chinantla, con su cabecera del mismo nombre, era una provincia mexicana" and Brinton (5, 24), in 1892, wrote that "The Chinantecs inhabited Chinantla, which is a part of the State of Oaxaca, situated in the Sierra Madre, on the frontier of the Province of Vera Cruz."

Unfortunately, the term *Chinantla* has not always retained its original and historically correct meaning. In recent years, it has been applied to other parts of Oaxaca. It has been used among historical and anthropological writers to refer to the entire area which the Chinantec Indians inhabit. This area includes most of the District of Tuxtepec, the northern half of the District of Choapam, a small part of the District of Villa Alta, the northeastern section of the District of Ixtlán, and most of the eastern third of the District of Cuicatlán, and so comprises the greater part of northeastern Oaxaca. Among the writers who have used *Chinantla* in this broad sense, the following may be cited.

In 1881, Gay referred many times to the Chinantla in his *Historia de Oaxaca* (13). He used the term in a very broad sense, stating that “La Chinantla es una provincia situada al norte de la ciudad de Oaxaca,” and he intimated that it was synonymous with the territory of the Chinantecs.

Belmar (4) wrote: “The Chinantecs occupy chiefly the Chinantla, comprising the Districts of Ixtlán, Choapam, Cuicatlán, Teotitlán, Villa Alta, and Tuxtepec”, and elsewhere (3) he used *Chinantla* similarly.

Burgoa (in 2) suggested that the *Chinantla* was a synonym of the area inhabited by the Chinantecs and stated that it lay “beyond Villa Alta.”

Although Bevan (2) carefully discussed the meaning of the name *Chinantla* and pointed out that it has been used in four different senses, he stated that in his opinion “the name La Chinantla is, . . . a synonym for the region where any dialect of Chinantec is spoken.”

In his writings on southern Mexico, Starr (31) has used *Chinantla* to refer exclusively to the eastern third of the District of Cuicatlán, which is Chinantec territory, especially to the region around San Pedro Sochiapam (long. $96^{\circ}41'$, lat. $17^{\circ}53'$) and San Juan Zautla (long. $96^{\circ}40'$, lat. $17^{\circ}58'$).

III. USE BY BOTANISTS

In reviewing the use of *Chinantla* in the writings of botanical explorers who knew the region personally, it is interesting to discover that the term was consistently employed in its historically correct sense.

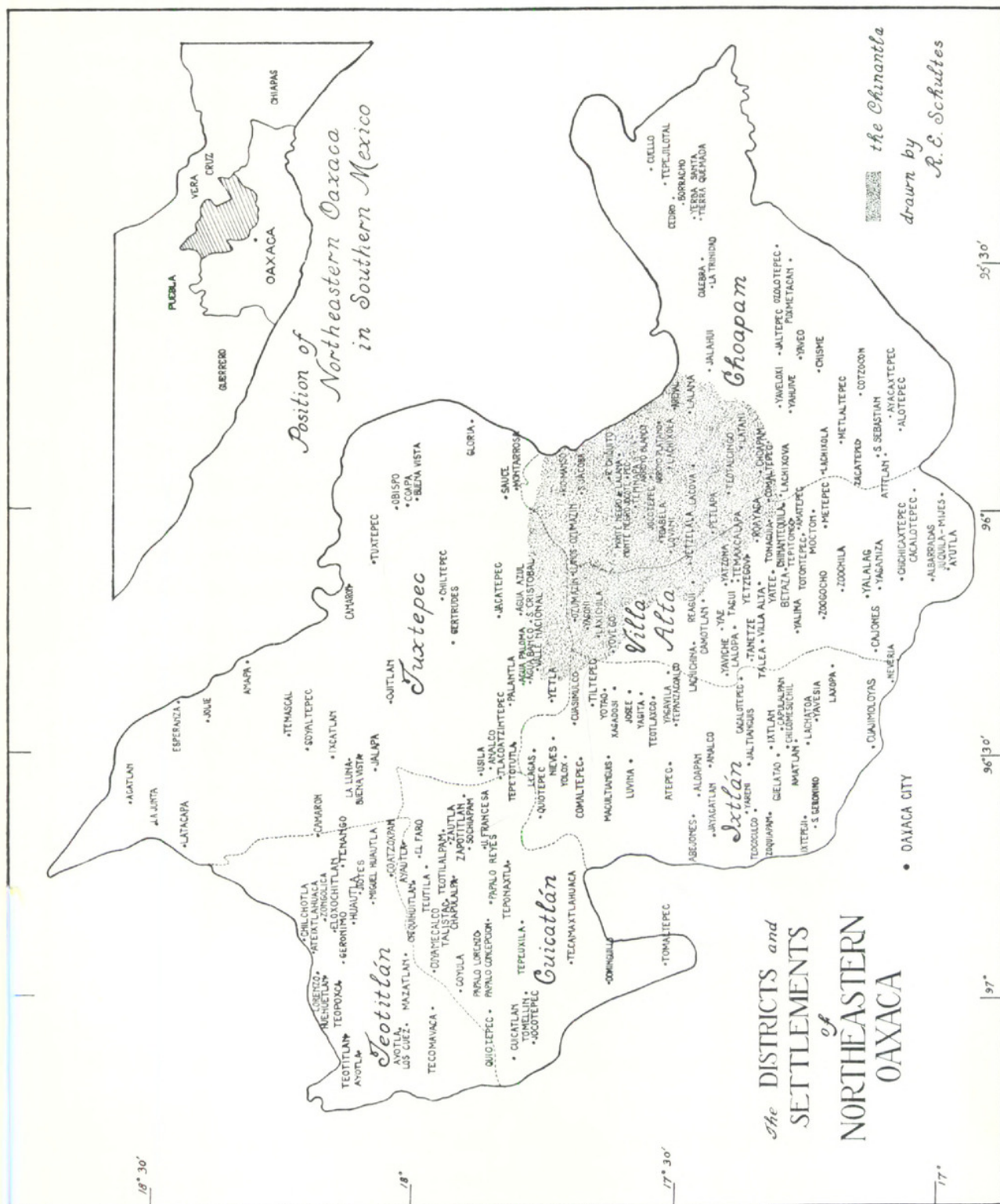
Among the early botanical explorers who travelled in Oaxaca, Galeotti, Hartweg and Liebmann penetrated into the Chinantla, carrying on their explorations almost simultaneously. Galeotti and Hartweg worked in the

EXPLANATION OF THE MAP

This map is based upon a study of several old manuscript maps; Conzatti's *Mapa biologico y minerológico del Estado de Oaxaca* (1918), scale 1:500,000; the 1937 edition of the map of *Oaxaca* of the Departamento de Geográfico (Mexico), scale 1:1,000,000; the map of *North America*, section E-14, of the American Geographical Society of New York (1938), scale 1:1,000,000; the maps in Bevan (2); and upon field observations made by the writer in 1938 and 1939.

Many places which are of historical interest to botanists have been indicated on the map. The localities visited by the early botanical explorers (Galeotti, Hartweg, Jürgensen, Karwinski, Liebmann, Nelson, etc.) are included.

Scale: approximately 1:1,670,000



region during the spring and early summer of 1839, and Liebmann followed in 1842.

These early European collectors used the name *Chinantla* freely in their field notes, and the name has appeared in their own taxonomic papers, as well as in later monographs and in biographies and itineraries of the explorers. Since the Galeotti and Liebmann collections are represented by a number of specimens in North American herbaria and since their collections seem to have been more extensive and important than those of Hartweg, the following discussion and examples of the use of the name *Chinantla* are based on the work of these two men.

In several publications (1, 6, 14, 16, 18, 22), general discussions of the itineraries of Galeotti and Liebmann in Mexico have appeared. In most of these, *Chinantla* is used to refer to a district, but Alston (1) has stated that Liebmann collected in “. . . Chinantla, a village on the slopes of Mt. Sempoaltepec . . .”. A clear discussion is found in Oersted’s introduction to Liebmann’s *Chênes de l’ Amérique tropicale* (22) and in Liebmann’s *Mexicos Bregner* . . . (18). The former stated that: “Dans la contrée montagneuse peu connue et peu habitée de Chinantla, Liebmann fit un riche moisson de plantes nouvelles . . .”; the latter briefly reported that Liebmann had travelled through “det saakaldte Sierra de Oajaca med Indbefåttelse af Districterne Ixtlán, Chuapam, Villa alta og Chinantla . . .”.

A study of the actual collection-data of these two explorers is more instructive. From an examination of Galeotti and Liebmann collections and from a study of the citations in numerous taxonomic publications (17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23), it has been possible to work out the itineraries of these collectors in northeastern Oaxaca (still to be published) and to ascertain the exact region which they meant to designate by the word *Chinantla*.

From this study, it is clear that both Galeotti and Liebmann used the term in its historically accurate sense to denote the region which is shaded on the map which accompanies this article. Usually, Galeotti and Liebmann cited actual towns in the Chinantla, but, in some cases, especially in the Galeotti collections, the specimens are labelled simply "Chinantla", sometimes even without the designation of the state. It is this, primarily, which has confused taxonomists who believed Chinantla to be a town but who were unable to find such a town on the maps of Oaxaca.

A few examples selected from the hundreds of collections of Galeotti and Liebmann will indicate the clarity with which they used the name *Chinantla*.

Galeotti:

Piper chinantlensis Mart. & Gal. "On trouve cette espèce dans les belles forêts de la Chinantla, région située sur le versant oriental de la cordillère orientale d'Oaxaca, à 3,000 pieds."

Quercus acutifolia Née "On trouve cette belle espèce dans les forêts si riches et si variées de la Chinantla, à Tonaguía (parte orientale de la cordillère orientale d'Oaxaca)."

Smilacina paniculata Mart. & Gal. "Chinantla, région fertile et humide, située sur la déclivité océanique de la cordillère orientale d'Oaxaca."

Smilax multiflora Mart. & Gal. "Ce Smilax entoure les arbres des forêts de la Chinantla près du bourg indien de Lalana (département d'Oaxaca) à 3,000 pieds d'élévation."

Liebmann:

Begonia pustulata Liebm. "I skyggefulde fugtige Bjergskove ved Lacoba i Districtet Chinantla i Dep. Oajaca . . ."

Begonia reptans Benth. "Hartweg fandt det ved S. Pedro Tepinapa i Chinantla i Dep. Oajaca."

Dieffenbachia Seguine Schott " . . . bjergige Landskab Chinantla i østlige Oaxaca."

Hydnostachyon brevirostra Liebm. "Cuesta de Teotalcingo imellem Chuapam og Teotalcingo (Districtet Chinantla, 4-5000') . . ."

Liebmann also visited Chinautla in the State of Puebla, the locality which has been confused with the Oaxacan Chinantla. There is no possibility of ambiguity in Liebmann's notes, for, as the following examples indicate, he carefully denoted the state and, in several cases, actually contrasted the two names.

Acrostichum Schiedei Ktze. "Byen Tiuzutlán og Indierlandsbyen Chinautla i Dep. Puebla 7-8000'."

Polypodium angustum (Willd.) Liebm. "... i Chinantla S. Pedro Tepinapa (2,500'), paa Ege Tiuzutlán og Chinautla."

The towns and villages of the Chinantla in which Galeotti and Liebmann collected include the following in the District of Choapam: San Juan Comaltepec, Santiago Choapam, Santiago Jocotepec, San Juan Lacova, San Juan Lalana, Santa María Lovani, San Juan Petlapa, San Juan Teotalcingo, San Juan Toabela, San Pedro Tepinapa; and Santa María Tonaguía in the District of Villa Alta.

In his writings (8, 9, 10, 11), Professor Conzatti, the contemporary authority on the flora of Oaxaca, has consistently used the term *Chinantla* in its historical sense. He has also used the modification *Chinantla-cuicateca* to refer to the eastern third of the District of Cuicatlán where he collected in 1898 and in 1909. Although this term has been misunderstood, there should be no ambiguity in Conzatti's use of the word in this heterodox manner because of the clarity and fullness of the localities cited on Conzatti collections (28).

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that the early botanical collectors used *Chinantla* in its historically accurate sense. At the present time, however, there is a tendency to misapply the word to designate the entire area of northeastern Oaxaca inhabited by the Chinantec Indians. It is unfortunate that such a broad use of the

word *Chinantla* has occurred, even though it may be, for ethnologists at least, a more convenient term than others which might have been coined for the Chinantec-area. In all botanical work, however, it is necessary to restrict the word to its original meaning and to use it only for the area which is shaded on the map. The use in botanical work of any extended application of the name will result in floristic and ecological errors ; inasmuch as the area occupied by the Chinantecs comprises many types of country, while the Chinantla is almost completely rain forested.

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