

A CULTURAL GEOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS AND  
INTERPRETATION OF ROADSIDE  
SHRINES IN NORTHEAST  
MEXICO

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. ROADSIDE SHRINES - TWO DISTINCT PHENOMENA.....	1
Research Problem.....	5
Organization of Study.....	6
Scope and Limitations.....	7
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
Historical Perspective of Roadside Shrines	13
Origins of Roadside Shrines.....	14
Diffusion of Roadside Chapels.....	15
Representation of Holy Personages.....	16
III. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY.....	19
Data Collection.....	19
Methodology.....	24
IV. <u>CRUCES</u> - THE VERNACULAR ELEMENT.....	32
<u>Cruz</u> Distribution in Micro Area.....	33
<u>Cruz</u> Distribution in Macro Area.....	37
Material Composition of <u>Cruces</u> .....	40
Distribution of <u>Cruz</u> Color.....	50
Typologies of Micro Area <u>Cruces</u> .....	52
V. <u>CAPILLAS</u> - RELIGIOUS RESTSTOPS.....	63
<u>Capilla</u> Usage.....	64
Distribution of <u>Capillas</u> .....	66
Analysis of <u>Capilla</u> Contents.....	70
VI. CONCLUSION.....	86
Death as Place.....	87
Cultural Interpretation.....	89
REFERENCES.....	92
APPENDIX - Description of Individual <u>Cruces</u> .....	99

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. Composition of <u>Cruces</u> .....	41
II. Color of <u>Cruces</u> .....	51
III. Study Area <u>Cruz</u> Dates.....	53
IV. Features of Study Area <u>Cruces</u> .....	55
V. Representation of Holy Personages.....	85

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. <u>Capilla del San Judas Tadeo</u> .....	2
2. Northern Mexican States.....	20
3. Macro Study Area.....	21
4. Micro Study Area.....	23
5. Ornate Stone <u>Cruz</u> on Pedestal.....	26
6. Plain Stone <u>Cruz</u> with Flowers.....	26
7. Wooden <u>Cruz</u> at Crossroads.....	27
8. Metal <u>Cruz</u> of Pipe.....	27
9. Ornate Wrought Iron <u>Cruz</u> .....	28
10. Straw <u>Cruz</u> Covered with Paper.....	28
11. Roadside Shrine Sites in Micro Area.....	35
12. Roadside Shrine Sites in Macro Area.....	38
13. Divisions of Macro Region.....	43
14. <u>Cruz</u> Composition in Northern Macro Area.....	44
15. <u>Cruz</u> Composition in Central Macro Area.....	45
16. <u>Cruz</u> Composition in Southern Macro Area.....	46
17. Composition of Micro Area <u>Cruces</u> .....	47
18. Composition of East Macro Area <u>Cruces</u> .....	48
19. <u>Cruz</u> Placed on Crypt Base.....	56
20. Straw <u>Cruz</u> and <u>Cruz</u> with Crucifix.....	56
21. Fenced Wooden <u>Cruz</u> .....	58
22. <u>Cruz</u> in Tile Roofed Enclosure.....	58

Figure	Page
23. <u>Cruz</u> Site with Three Fatalities.....	60
24. New <u>Cruces</u> Replacing Old.....	60
25. Large, Ornate Monument.....	61
26. Evidence of an Ongoing Custom - Added to Study Area Fall of 1990.....	61
27. <u>Capilla</u> Sites in Macro Area.....	67
28. <u>Capillas</u> in Micro Area.....	69
29. Photographs and Business Cards Surrounding the Virgin of Guadalupe.....	71
30. Display of Images in Niches <u>Capilla del San Judas Tadeo</u> .....	71
31. Candles and Flowers Offered The Virgin of Guadalupe and St. Jude.....	73
32. Candles Placed Before Images Of the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos.....	73
33. Hilltop <u>Capilla</u> above Vallecillos.....	75
34. The Virgin of Guadalupe, St. Jude San Martin de Porres, Jesus <u>Capilla del Corazon del Jesus</u> .....	76
35. <u>Capilla</u> of Bustamante.....	76
36. The Virgin of Guadalupe, St. Jude & Unidentified Franciscan (seated) <u>Capilla</u> at Bustamante.....	78
37. <u>Capilla</u> at Candela Station.....	78
38. <u>Capilla</u> at Candela.....	79
39. Portrait of Monk - Candela <u>Capilla</u> .....	79
40. <u>Capilla</u> of St. John the Baptist.....	81
41. Portrait of St. John <u>Capilla</u> of St. John the Baptist.....	81
42. <u>Capilla</u> at Lampazos.....	82



Figure	Page
43. The Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos.....	82
44. <u>Cruces</u> in Micro Area.....	100

## CHAPTER I

### ROADSIDE SHRINES - TWO DISTINCT PHENOMENA

The first cruz (cross) south of Nuevo Laredo makes a bright splash of color against the pebbles and dusty brush of the roadside. It sits on the east side of the road, the barbed wire fence forming a backdrop. The monument is man-made. This is not a prefabricated cemetery headstone out of place. A green colored concrete block has been hand poured to form the base for a white wrought iron cross. The base, set in a puddle of roughly poured concrete on the desert pavement, stands about a foot and a half high. A metal nameplate about the size of a license tag is inscribed with carefully lettered green paint:

Rodrigo Flores Diaz  
13 de marzo 1949  
7 de septiembre 1983

The tips of the cross, shaped in an arrowhead fashion, have also been painted green, reflecting the creator's aesthetic sense of balance. A bouquet of bright red paper flowers is attached at the base of the cross. It is a very simple monument in a physical sense. In a cultural sense, however, it is extraordinary.

Travellers pass numerous cruces as they drive down the highway. Several miles past the first encounter,

however, they find a new phenomenon. A small whitewashed building stands about twenty-five feet off the highway. It is unusual, yet unimposing from the outside.

The building is perhaps twelve by twelve feet. The front wall has been extended up in a mission style with a wrought iron cross at the crest. The facade shimmers in the heat under stark whitewash. Two tiled pictures, one above and the other to the right of the door, depict St. Jude. Hand-lettered slogans in brilliant shades of red, blue and green proclaim:

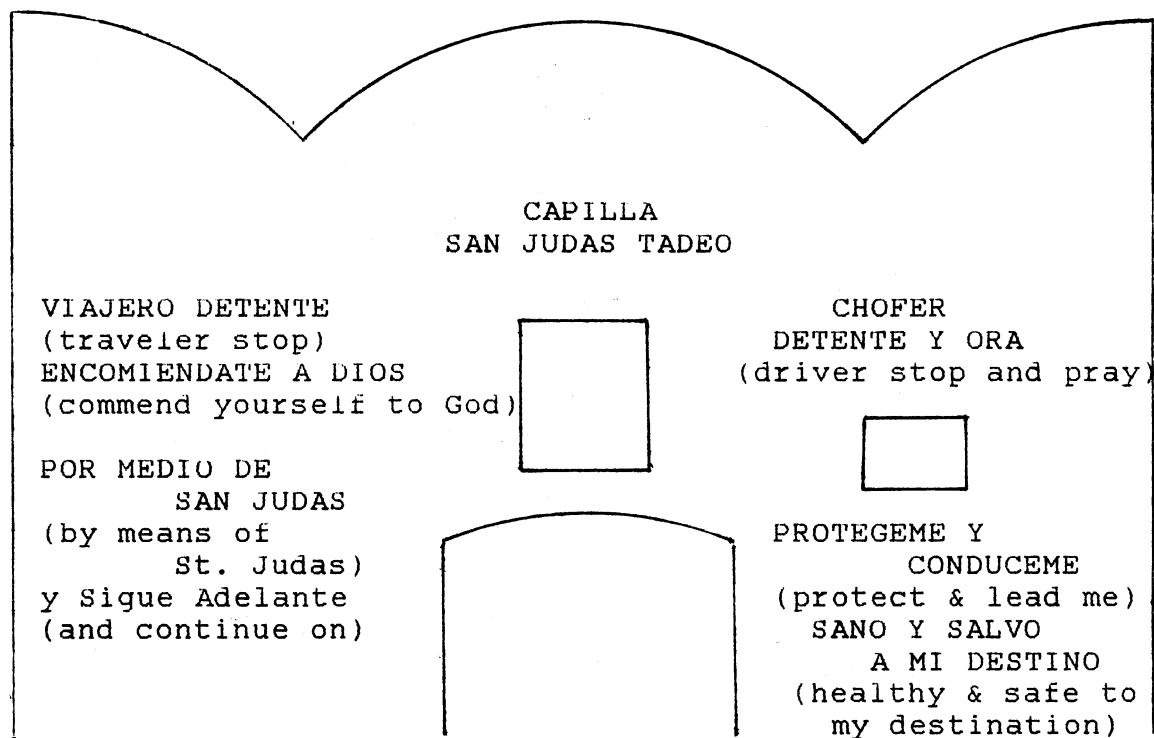


Figure 1. Capilla del San Judas Tadeo

A narrow porch supports concrete benches on either side of the arched double doorway. Before the structure

extends the rutted driveway; on the south a refuge pile of old candles and discarded flowers. A makeshift booth to the north offers a limited selection of bottled pop and snacks. The rapid flow of traffic leaves the air vibrating with the stench of gasoline fumes.

The simplistic outside of the Capilla del San Judas does not prepare the uninitiated for entry into the shrine. Visitors make the sign of the cross, then step through the threshold into a kind of sensory sanctuary. The world darkens, stills, and the odors of the highway are replaced by those of burning candles and freshly cut flowers. Colors are overwhelming. Reds, blues, and golds flicker in the candlelight. Eyes quickly adjust from the harsh glare outside, and details of the shrine begin to emerge. A feeling of isolation from the outside world persists. It is a place conducive to peace and contemplation.

Entering the capilla cannot be equated to the feeling one has when entering a church, that of majesty, infinity and awe. The space is small and simple in design. Rows of wooden benches are placed on the concrete floor. This place is holy, but the soul does not soar. It is rather sheltered. The capilla is truly a rest stop.

Although the subject of this paper began as a single topic, roadside shrines of northeast Mexico, it was discovered early in the field research that roadside shrines were actually two distinct phenomena, cruces and capillas. Cruces are markers put up to memorialize the site of a

traffic fatality. Capillas are small chapels built to commemorate or honor a saint.

An individual or vernacular marker in the public domain is not something that is commonly found in most parts of the United States, although cruces may be found in some parts of the Southwest. A physical display of individualism to mark one's place in America is commonly called graffiti - a term with definite derogatory connotations no matter how aesthetically pleasing may be the design. Monuments and markers are found on highways across the states, but they are of a public nature. They mark sites of general interest, not of personal significance. The cruces, on the other hand, mark a place of strong individual identity. As such, they reflect the individual elements of the culture which make up the whole rather than culture imposed from a self-appointed elite. Capillas, unlike cruces, are not secular markers but are small shrines dedicated to specific holy personages. They may be a small building containing a few or many religious artifacts. Capillas are other times encased miniature depictions of religious scenes or collections of religious artifacts, generally standing from six to eight feet in height. They are public in nature, inviting travellers to stop and pay homage or ask blessings of the patron saint.

Capillas and cruces, whether a single wooden cross on a narrow strip of highway or a more elaborate architectural structure, are religious features which represent both the

individual and societal imprint of man on the land, and as such may reflect the country's religion, history, its patterns of settlement, economics and culture. They are also a part of the daily interaction between people and landscape. The landscape of cruces and capillas is one of constant change. Although both may be permanent reference points on the land, the contents of the capillas may change from hour to hour, and the distribution of cruces may change from week to week. They are thus reflective not only of historical trends but also of current usage patterns.

#### Research Problem

Roadside shrines can be noted by visitors and natives of Mexico whenever they travel. However, no systematic study has been done of the spatial occurrence of these landscape elements or of their significance to the cultural landscape. This study will provide a location analysis of cruces and capillas and a typology of the material composition of cruces within a defined study area. A more detailed survey of individual cruces and an inventory of capilla contents will then be done within a micro section of the original study area to develop typologies and detailed descriptions of roadside shrines.

Observations at selected capillas and interviews will provide information on traffic and usage patterns. Change over time will be noted by spacing observations of selected sites over a period of six months.

Further research on the history of the area, Hispanic Catholicism and Mexican beliefs and customs concerning death and dying will be used to analyze the cultural significance of roadside shrines in the study region.

#### Organization of the Study

As capillas and cruces comprise two distinct elements in the cultural landscape, this study will regard them as individual entities while at the same time realizing that both may be grouped under one category of material manifestations of religion along the roadways. It will therefore be necessary to locate, describe, type and analyze cruces and capillas separately before attempting to integrate the individual elements into a broader conceptual framework.

Cruces will be mapped then locations analyzed to discern density, patterns in grouping and relative location to urban settlements. Typologies will then be developed on the material composition of cruces within the macro area. Within the micro area typologies will be generated on more detailed elements of cruz design and decoration.

Capillas will similarly be spatially analyzed throughout the macro study region. The more limited number of capillas within the micro area, however, is more conducive to description of individual shrine content and identification of holy personages represented in the shrine rather than groupings of capilla type. Direct comparisons

and contrasts can then be made between sites. Direct observation and interviews at selected capillas will provide data concerning traffic and usage patterns.

Finally, an integration of the two phenomena grouped as roadside shrines will be made in the context of historical research. An analysis of this information will provide a basis for conclusions as to the interpretive significance of roadside shrines.

#### Limitations of the Study

Due to limited field time and finances, this study will concentrate on a limited region, although it is recognized that a survey and comparison of several selected regions would increase the value of the conclusions drawn. Also, language and other cultural differences will have to be accepted as perceptual filters, whether that be negative or positive, in the interpretation of results. Having an intellectual interest in Catholicism rather than being an adherent to the faith might also affect the conclusions. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the findings may be of potential value in understanding and interpreting the role of roadside shrines in the cultural landscape of northern Mexico.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the early 1930's geographers have recognized the value of systematic investigation of cultural landscape features. Fred Kniffen's "Louisiana House Types" (1936) was a pioneering work in the examination of specific cultural landscape features which could be used as indicators of cultural diffusion or as earmarks to define culture regions. Succeeding generations have identified other landscape features which may be used to delineate culture regions. Trewartha (1948) did a systematic study of farmstead layouts to determine regional variation. Meinig (1965) used landscape to define the Mormon culture region. Other geographers have used established typologies to trace diffusion patterns such as Carney's (1983) use of the 'shotgun house' to trace migrant labor patterns in the oilfields.

Religion has long been recognized by cultural geographers as a primary element of nonmaterial culture. Only in recent years, however, have they begun to study the elements of religion in the cultural landscape and, conversely, the imprint of the natural landscape on religion. Sopher (1967) expresses a dual function of

geography in the study of religious landscape: "Geography can help to determine to what extent religious systems or their component elements are an expression of ecological circumstances" (p. 14). Religious stories and characters, however, may either be created from their surroundings or placed in an appropriate locality at a later date (Isaac, 1959). It may thus be unclear as to how much effect the environment may have had.

Sopher (1967) further states that, "By such indices as the varying ratio of unit cult structures to population, the landscape may tell something about the relative intensity of religious expression at different times and in different places" (p. 44). As Duncan (1980) points out, however, culture goes beyond the individuals involved. The religious landscape may thus express ideals and beliefs held by the culture beyond the conscious awareness of the presiding population. It is also not clear whether intensity of religious expression may be a direct element of landscape change. Isaac (1961) demonstrates that the degree of landscape change may be more dependent on the point of view of the belief system, those expressing religion as the process of world creation thereby providing for human existence at opposite poles from those who view religion as a covenant, than on the intensity of belief.

Geographers of religion have used a variety of methodologies to study patterns of religious affiliation and diffusion. Mapping of census data has provided a valuable

tool in the delineation of ethnic and social groups (Nostrand, 1969; Shortridge, 1977; Zelinsky, 1961). Further studies have shown that land usage and patterns of settlement may well be correlated with religious affiliation. Identification of land usage patterns has been used to provide a basis for group identity and diffusion of the Mormons (Francaviglia, 1978; Meinig, 1965). In addition, Newman (1986) explored the conflict of land use when burial space versus urbanization in Jewish communities. Rinschede (1986) investigated the affects of patterns of pilgrimage on the landscape as well as on the economy in his study of pilgrimage to Lourdes. Similarly, Nolan (1986) illustrated the interaction of land and religion in her article on western Europe correlating religious shrines with natural landscape features.

Identification of religious elements of the cultural landscape, especially those elements of a vernacular character, is a field that has only recently been touched upon by geographers. Although one might easily distinguish between a Catholic church and a synagogue or a mosque, the more subtle differences between a Ukrainian Catholic and a Roman Catholic cross are not so well known. These features, however, would be strong indicators of the ethnic character of the region. At the vernacular level the systematic investigation of cemetery markers, yard and household shrines, the appearance of religious artifacts in the secular landscape and land usage patterns of sacred imprint

can all be used as indicators of ethnic and social regions and diffusion.

Price (1966) in his study of cemeteries in southeastern Illinois used typologies of cemetery types to delineate time periods, economic affluence and urbanization. Jordan (1982) used typologies of cemetery plots and monuments as indicators of cultural diffusion and settlement in Texas of Hispanic, German and Southern ethnic groups. Specifically, he used distinct traits of monuments such as the use of shells, scraped earth plots and orientation to identify ethnic typologies. Field research into the distribution of these typologies over the study region was then done to map areas of ethnic diffusion. Francaviglia (1978) also used cemeteries to reflect the cultural imprint of different time periods by forming typologies of cemetery markers.

There has been some investigation into small chapels and shrines by geographers. Jordan (1976) looked at rural southern chapels in Texas. Laatsch and Calkins (1986) mapped private roadside shrines in Wisconsin to delineate the Belgian population. Griffith (1988) in his study of folk art in southern Arizona gave space to a description of cemetery markers and yardshrines.

These yardshrines, or personal shrines located on private property, have also received some notice from geographers. Manzo (1983) examined the religious monuments erected by Italian-Americans in Kansas City, Missouri and

Archbald, Pennsylvania. His findings correlated the monuments with southern Italian descent and aging family members. Curtis (1980) and Curtis & Helgren (1984) identified yard shrines as correlating with the expanding Cuban population of Miami. Husband (1985) explored the distribution and ornamentation of yard shrines and the economic and social implications of shrine ownership in the Tucson area. Arreola (1988) found that yard shrines were a common element in the housescaples of Hispanic Americans. The study of yardshrines has thus illustrated the relationship between shrine ownership and ethnic or social region.

South of the border there have been a number of studies done or essays written on the cultural traits of Mexicans (see, Toor, 1947; Paz, 1985; Ramos, 1962). Attempts have also been made to integrate the indigenous religion of Mexico with the overlay of Roman Catholicism to explain Hispanic religious customs (Braden, 1966). There is little information, however, on roadside shrines as a cultural landscape feature or as a reflection of cultural values.

Nolan (1973) examined the significance of pilgrimage to major shrines in Mexico. Her work, however, concentrated on the changing patterns of pilgrimage rather than on the material, social or ethnic value of the shrines themselves. Information has, of course, been recorded and verification sought for those shrines where miracles are purported to

have occurred. The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe is widely if not universally known within Mexico, but information about the hundreds of common shrines along the roadway is much more limited.

These shrines are a material manifestation of the history of the Mexican people and, as such, a study of them should contribute more to the understanding of ethnic diversity and settlement patterns within the mestizo population. In this sense, it is similar to other studies of the religious landscape such as Jordan's (1982) or to studies by authors such as J.B. Jackson (1979) who have also used landscape elements as clues for identifying both historical and ethnic roots. The intent of this study, therefore, is to investigate roadside shrines within a defined area, taking into account their location, distribution, orientation, age, contents, architectural structure and use. This information will then be used to establish a typology of shrines and a descriptive base for future regional comparisons. Further investigation will be done in an attempt to explain the significance of variations and regional limits of typologies.

#### Historical Perspective of Roadside Shrines

The study of roadside shrines brings up a number of questions beyond simply where they are and what they contain. It also is necessary to ask why they have been a historical part of the cultural landscape and why they continue to

flourish as an ongoing tradition. Further questions arise as to the choice of images found in the shrines and the possible significance of these choices. These questions can best be addressed by considering relevant results of the history of the Mexican people and the attitudes and customs which prevail in the country. An examination must be made, therefore, of holy personages who have played significant roles in Mexican history and of the historical origin of roadside shrines.

#### Origins of Roadside Shrines

The Mexican culture today is an assimilation of three predominant cultures of the past; an indigenous culture dominated in the north by the Aztecs, the Spanish culture of the Conquistadors and Catholic missionaries, and finally the pervasive influence of American culture from the north over the last century. Many writers have attempted the task of determining which traits of modern Mexico may be attributed to specific historical precedents. However, as in determining characteristics of any child from examining a set of parents, there are some traits that may be attributed to a single parent and some, probably most, that overlap. It is impossible to examine Hispanic Catholicism and determine it is, for instance, 70% Spanish influence, 25% indigenous and 5% other. It is impossible even to look at a single custom, such as the building of roadside shrines, and trace its building and use to a single set of sources. The melding of

influences has created a new entity. The value of examining the evolution towards this new entity is not then in determining exact elements of influence; it is rather an aid to defining the present in light of the past. In conclusion, answering the questions of why roadside shrines are as they are not only identifies historic trends, it more importantly identifies significant aspects of today's Mexican.

#### Diffusion of Roadside Chapels

The building of roadside capillas may be traced to the construction of similar structures in other Catholic lands like Bavaria and Austria. They are less common in Protestant and Jewish areas (Sopher, 1967). It was also the custom of the indigenous people of Mexico to keep small individual shrines (Arreola, 1988). The overlay of the Catholic custom on an already prevailing indigenous custom, therefore, made the building of roadside shrines a natural element to continue as a religious practice.

Although the first Franciscans probably arrived in northern Mexico in 1602, in the far northeast area explored in this study a shortage of priests continued for almost another century. A colony of Tlaxcaltecs was established in 1686 at what is now Bustamante. A decade later the discovery of silver promoted the establishment of Villaldama, Sabinas Hidalgo and finally Lampazos in 1752. Vallecillo and Candela were founded later, in 1766 and 1798, respectively (Gerhard, 1982). The area was thus a frontier outpost of the



empire of New Spain.

According to Whetten (1948), this geographic isolation from the influence of formal doctrine tended to perpetuate local customs in these areas instead of promoting integration into the universal church. Customs might differ from village to village depending on the traditional rites used to worship patron gods. Sanctified Catholicism as a universal religion was not as important to the individual as the Catholicism practiced within his village. The worship of the patron saint was theoretically as important as the Trinity for those isolated from the mainstream Catholic doctrine.

This emphasis is displayed today by villages and towns building capillas to honor their patron saints and collecting money to celebrate the saint's feast day. Often, it should be noted, the dances and songs of the fiesta may be traced back to indigenous rites which celebrated ancient gods who have been supplanted by Catholic saints (Braden, 1966). Just as historic isolation created these customs, areas geographically and culturally remote from outside influence such as small towns and interior regions show a tendency to continue these customs. Thus the overlay of Catholicism onto indigenous religions may be seen as a primary element of influence on religious customs and ideals today.

#### Representation of Holy Personages

Numerous holy personages are represented in the capillas in this study. Four, however, stand out as the most

significant images due to their presence in three or more shrines.

St. Jude, or Thaddeus, is the most common saint found in capillas in the study area. St. Jude is known as one of the twelve apostles and the brother of Jesus. He is the patron saint of desperate causes and may generally be recognized by the Medallion of Our Saviour on his breast (Drake, 1971). Perhaps due to his wide ranging powers of intervention in particularly trying situations and the occurrence of his feast day on October 28, just prior to the celebration of The Day of the Dead on November 2, he is a favorite in Mexico.

The appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the hill which formerly held the shrine of Tonantzin, Earth Mother in the indigenous Aztec religion, is one of the most significant events of Hispanic Catholicism. The Virgin first appeared to a poor Indian, Juan Diego. The Virgin required that Diego go to the Bishop and ask that a shrine be erected on the hill in her name. The peasant did as requested, but was unable to convince the Bishop of his vision. Upon returning to the hill, the Virgin told Diego to go and gather roses in his cloak as proof to take with him. Diego set forth to find the out of season flowers, and to his surprise filled his cloak. When he returned to the Bishop and opened his cloak an image of the Virgin was miraculously imprinted upon the cloth (Toor, 1947). The shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe containing the cloak of the Indian Juan Diego, mysteriously imprinted with the image of the Virgin as proof of his

vision, is the most famous pilgrimage spot in Mexico. The Virgin of Guadalupe, also known as the Dark Virgin due to her appearing in the guise of an Indian, is identified by the blue cloak surrounding her image. Mexicans identify her as their patron saint.

The Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos is a small but miraculous figure much venerated in northern Mexico and the southern United States. She is purported to have performed miracles since 1542, when her image was lost then rescued and restored after a Chichimeca uprising (Toor, 1947). In studies done by Husband (1985) and Arreola (1988), her image was found to be a principle component of many yard shrines. The tiny Virgin can be identified by her flowing blue gown and long hair.

The fourth image often found is that of Jesus, most commonly in the form of the Sacred Heart. The crucifix and Jesus as a child are also images common to several shrines. As the capillas are built to honor patron saints, however, the image of Jesus generally does not hold the most central location in the shrine.

## CHAPTER III

### DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

#### Data Collection

A macro study area for a location analysis and cultural geographic interpretation of cruces and capillas was first delineated in northeast Mexico (Figure 2). The area was outlined by travelling south on Highway 57 from Piedras Negras to Nueva Rosita, southeast on Highway 22 to Anahuac then northeast up Highway 1 to Nuevo Laredo. From Nuevo Laredo the route continued south on Highway 85 to Monterrey, west on Highway 40 to Saltillo then Torreon, north on Highway 49 to Jimenez then north on Highway 45 to Juarez and the Mexico - United States border (Figure 3). A total of approximately 1300 miles of roadway was thus included in the location analysis of cruces and capillas and in the material composition typology of cruces.

A micro study region was then identified within the larger macro region. Criteria for selecting the micro region included the presence of a modern transport highway, an older colonial highway and connecting rural roadways. Highways paralleling the international border were ruled out as possibly containing a degree of non-Hispanic influence that might skew the data.

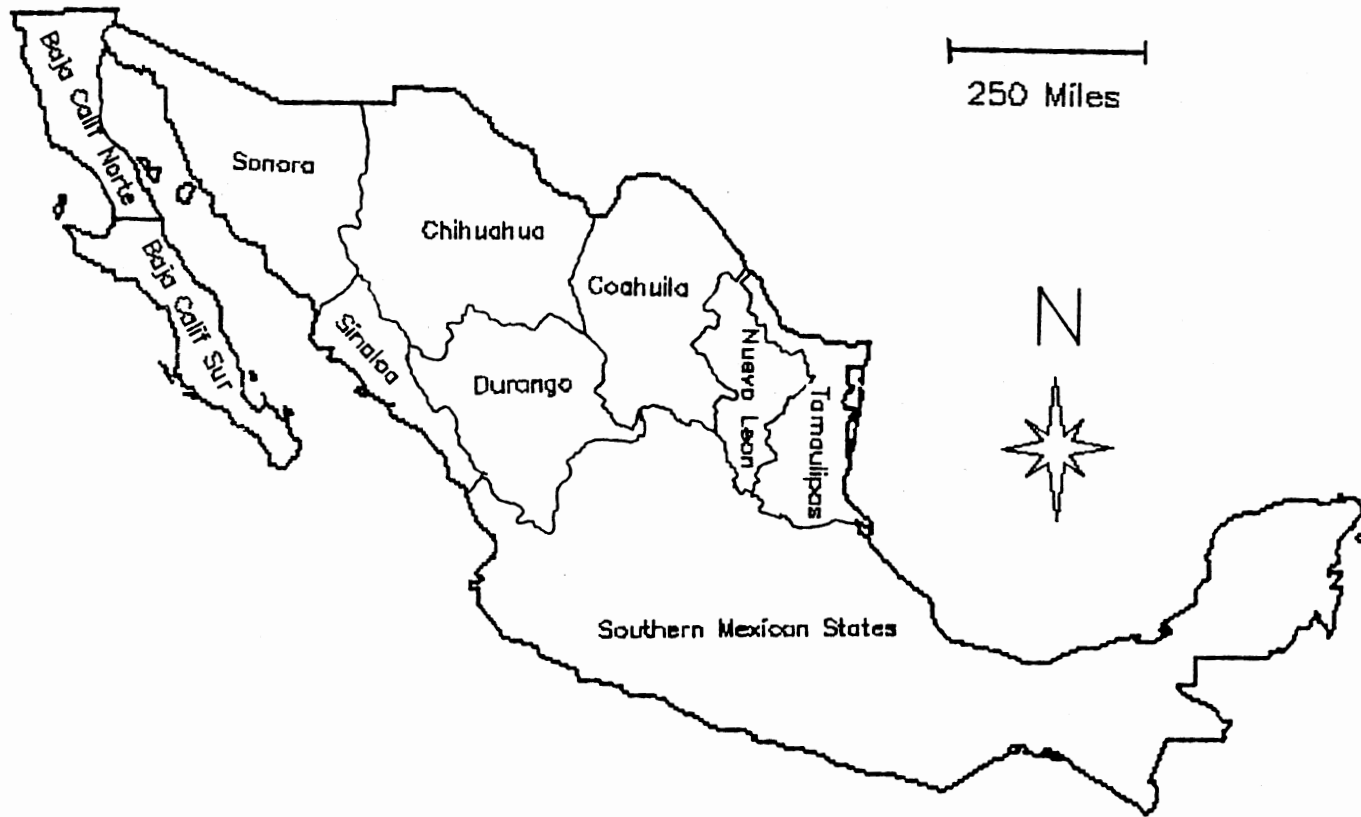


Figure 2. Northern Mexican States

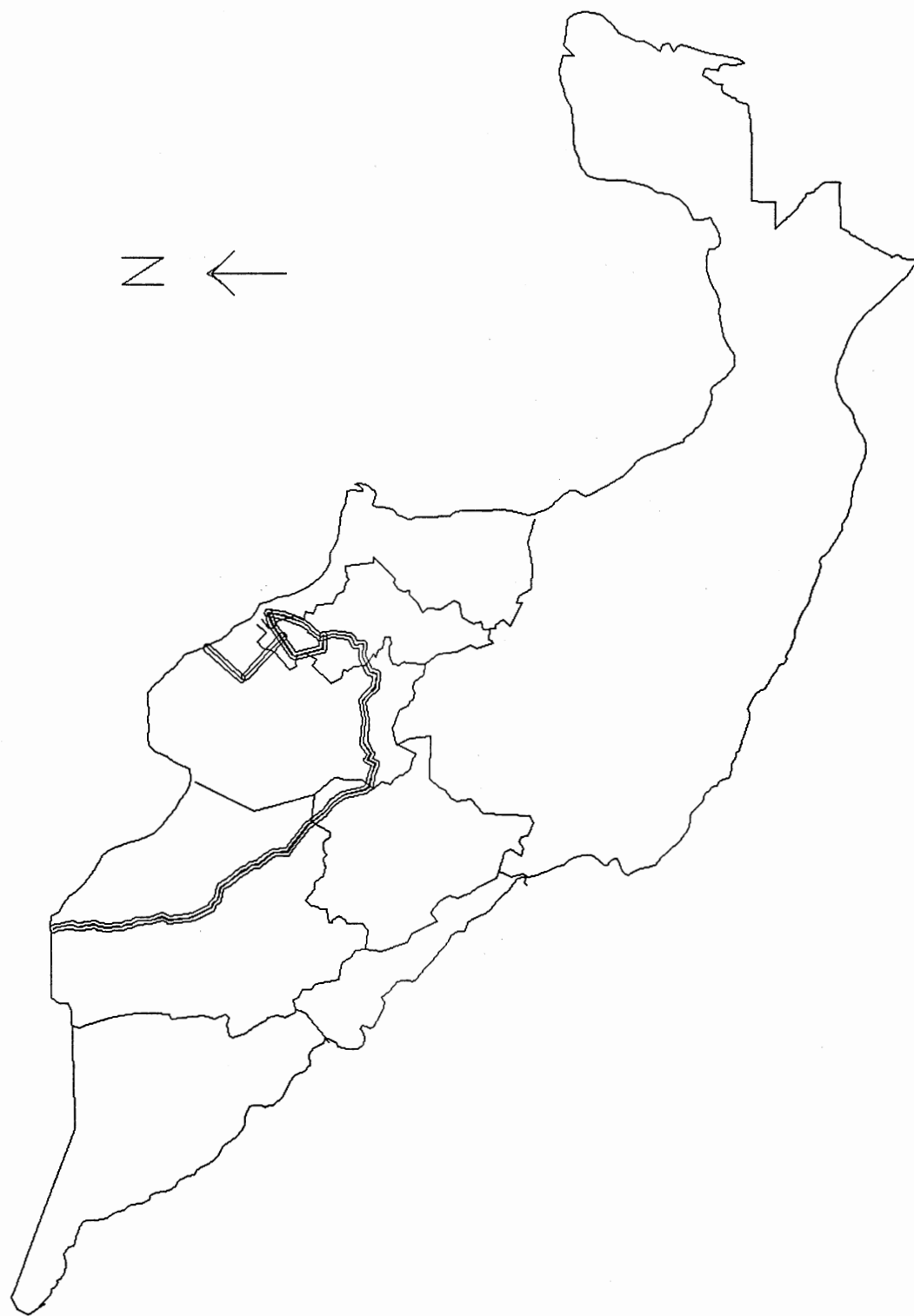


Figure 3. Macro Study Area

An area conforming to these criteria was found covering parts of three Mexican states: the far northern point of Tamaulipas, northern Nuevo Leon and eastern Coahuila. The micro study region selected is bounded by Highway 85 from Nuevo Laredo to Sabinas Hidalgo, Highway 3 from Sabinas Hidalgo to Villaldama and Highway 1 from Villaldama back to Nuevo Laredo. A 25 mile section of Highway 30 from Candela Station to Huizachal was added, totaling 218 miles. Rural roads interconnecting the highways were then included, adding approximately 50 miles of roadway (Figure 4). Highway 85 is a section of the Pan American Highway, thus meeting one of the criteria for a major transportation corridor. Highway 1 roughly follows the route of a former colonial highway. Highway 22 provides more local transportation rather than being a major tourist thoroughfare.

Locational data were initially gathered in March of 1990 by traversing the micro study area, plotting the precise location for each cruz site and capilla. Cruz sites, which may contain one or more monuments at the location of an accident, were mapped for purposes of location analysis. Additional data were generated in May of the same year by driving the area again, noting locations of new cruz sites. (No new capillas were observed.) A third survey in October of 1990 provided a final data base of 73 individual cruces within 48 cruz sites and 10 capillas in the micro study area.

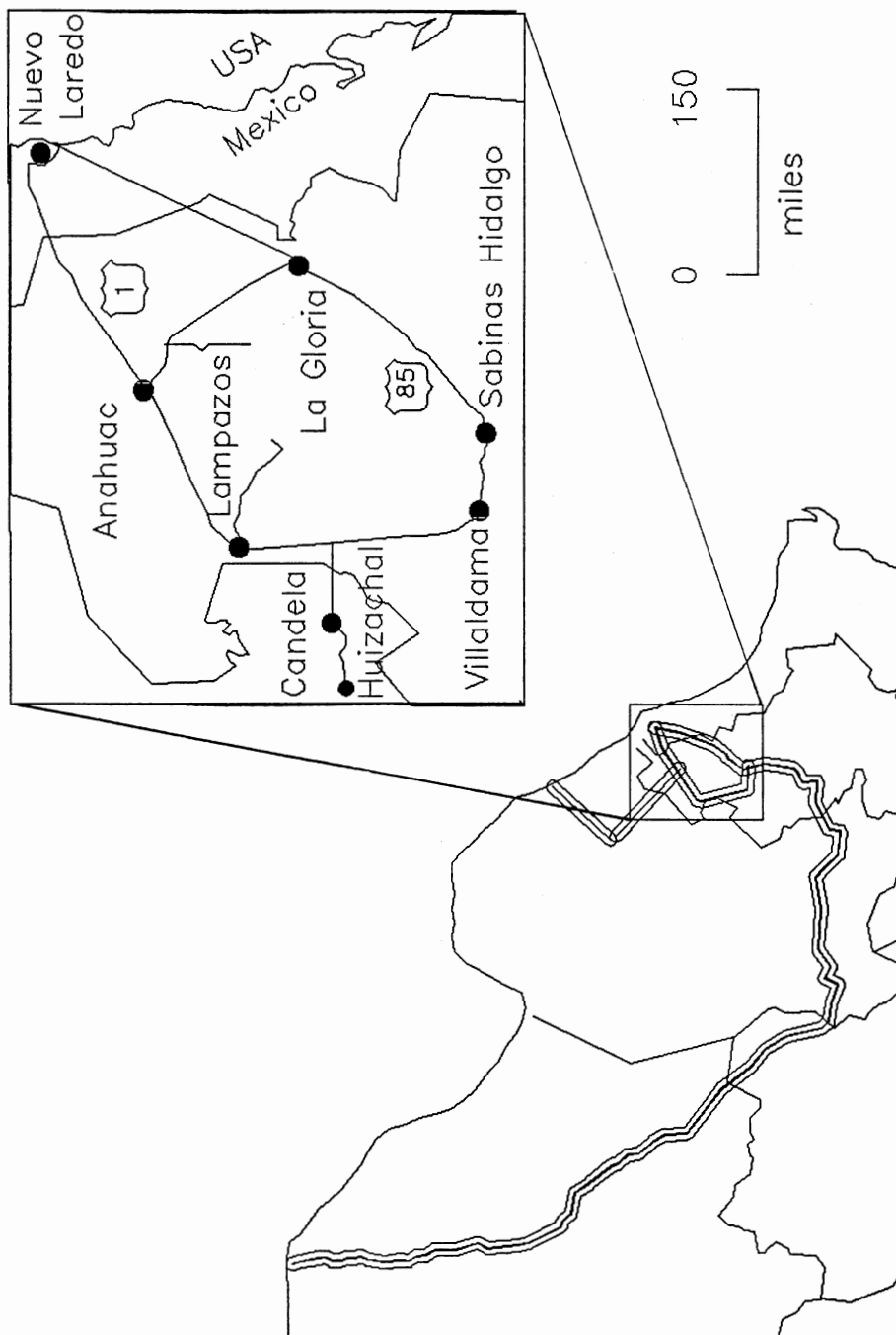


Figure 4. Micro Study Area



Locational data were gathered in the same fashion for the macro study region in May of 1990. An additional 243 cruces and 15 capillas were mapped providing a data base of 316 cruces and 25 capillas.

### Methodology

Cruces were mapped for the entire study area in order to determine patterns of grouping and density both as a regional phenomenon and as an effect of distance decay from urban settlements. Recording the direction each cruz faced was ignored as inconsequential as all cruces in the study area were oriented with the highway.

Data were collected on the cruces in the micro area in the following manner. At each marker the location and a physical description of the cruz was recorded. This included architectural details, ornamental elements and decorations such as flowers or other removable items. Photographs of the cruces were also taken as an aid in forming typologies. In the macro area only the location, physical composition and color were recorded.

Cruces within the micro study area were subsequently classified according to size, physical composition, color, architectural details, decorations and date. Cruces within the expanded area were typed by color and physical composition only.

Size was delineated into three categories: small, medium and large. Small cruces are those which stand less

than two and one half feet high, inclusive of any type of base. Medium cruces are those measuring from two and one half to three and one half feet tall. Large cruces stand over four feet tall or are placed on crypts over four feet long.

Physical composition was divided into typologies by the material which composed the most prominent portion of the shrine, whether that part of the shrine was the base or the cross. An exception was made for those cruces within some type of enclosure. The material from which the enclosure was constructed was ignored in the physical composition typology of the cruz. Typologies of physical composition include stone, which may be natural stone, concrete, or composition stone (Figures 5 & 6); wood (Figure 7); metal, which may be pipe, reinforcing rod or ornamental ironwork (Figures 8 & 9); straw (Figure 10); or tile. The use of tile was only found on one cruz within the study area and thus is included with straw as a category designated 'others'.

The typology of color indicates use of any color other than white or of black lettering on the permanent structure of a marker. Cruces typed as blue, therefore, may have only lettering, bases or decorative features of blue with the primary color of the cross itself being white. Cruces which were left in their natural state, i.e., metal pipes, were not typed by color.

Cruces within the primary study area were further



Figure 5. Ornate Stone Cruz on Pedestal



Figure 6. Plain Stone Cruz with Flowers



Figure 7. Wooden Cruz at Crossroads

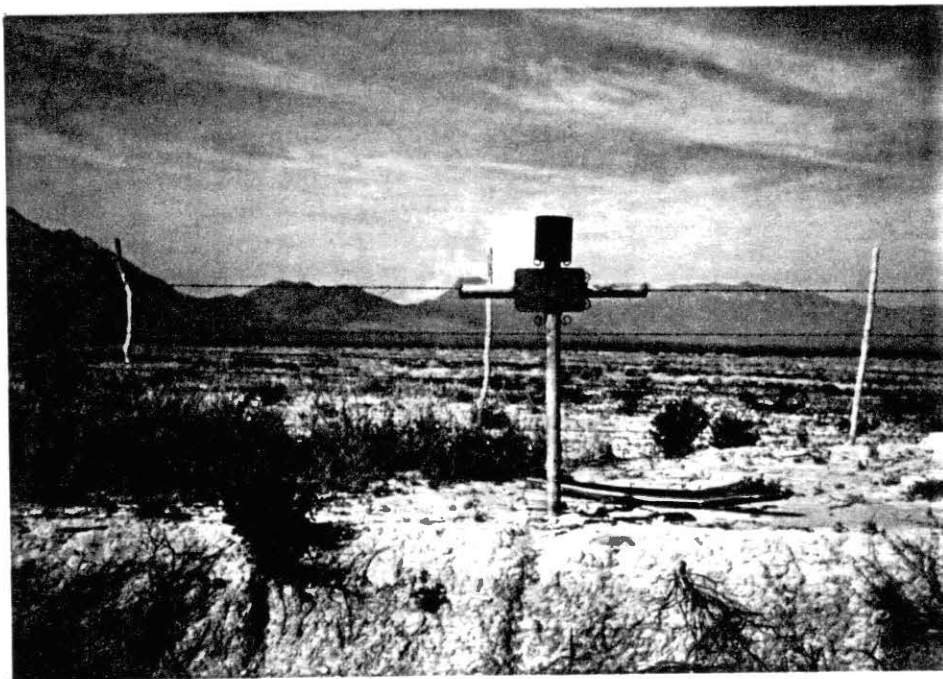


Figure 8. Metal Cruz of Pipe

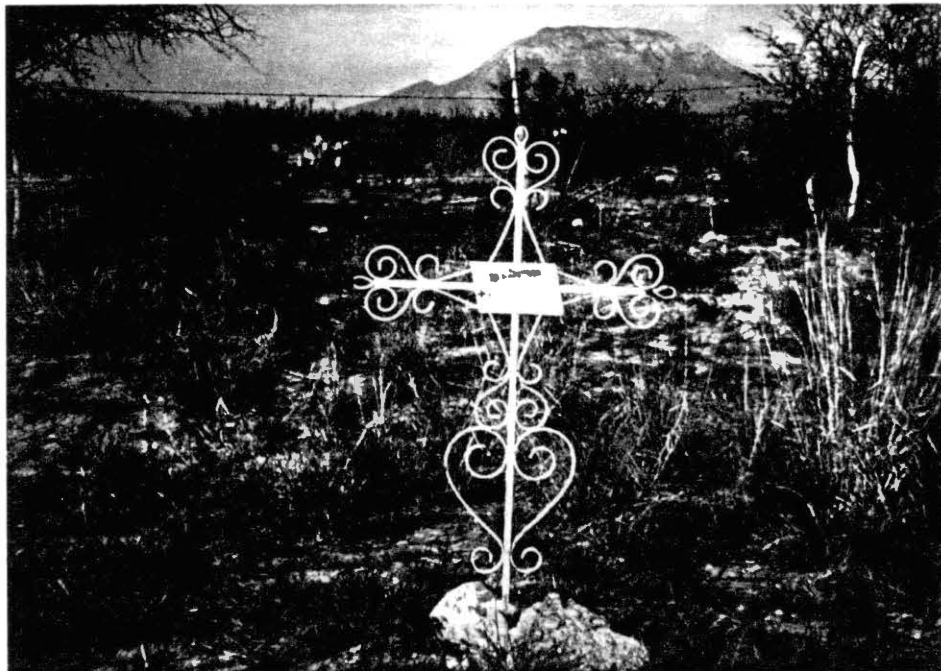


Figure 9. Ornate Wrought Iron Cruz



Figure 10. Straw Cruz Covered with Paper

typed by size and architectural features contained in the design of the cruz. Features which were noted included the presence or absence of a base, defined as any structure which supported a cross including not only formed stone bases but also piled natural stones. Also noted was the presence of permanent urns incorporated into the design of the shrine. In addition, typologies included those cruces with name plaques, enclosures, niches, and crypts. All but two of the cruces contained as an element of the design some form of cross. As it was questionable whether this was a purposeful omission or a result of accident or vandalism these were not identified as separate types.

A typology was constructed on the elements of temporary decoration found at the cruz sites. These included the presence of flowers, ribbon, tissue paper or other items left at or temporarily attached to the shrine.

The final element typed was for date of death marked on the cruz. Approximately one half of the shrines indicated a date of death. Of these, cohorts were divided into five year time spans from 1945, the oldest date found, through October, 1990, when the study ended.

Once all cruz elements were typed, frequency charts were generated for color and composition of shrines within the entire study area. In the micro study area frequency charts were generated for the additional typologies. The percentage of each element within the typology was figured as an aid in determining overall characteristics.

The much fewer number of capillas in the study area and their diversified nature did not lend itself to a useful creation of typologies. Rather a more descriptive approach was used to identify individual elements contained in the capillas.

Data on capilla contents in the micro area were collected by systematically recording contents of each chapel and by taking photographs of each section of the capilla. Contents were recorded in March, May and October of 1990 in each shrine to determine change over time. Identification was then made of the images of holy personages represented within each capilla with the aid of distinguishing features of historical significance. For example, St. Jude was identified by the emblem which embellishes his chest and the Virgin of Guadalupe by the aureole or cape which surrounds her image. The number of different images was calculated as well as the number of times each image was represented.

Elements of construction of the shrine enclosure were also recorded. The size of the building, the presence of a porch or benches and construction materials were noted. Identified also were general topographic elements such as relative location to other structures, distance from roadways or elevation.

Observation of traffic and usage patterns as well as personal interviews were useful in analyzing the current significance of the capillas, i.e., who stopped at the

shrines, for what purpose and how often. The changing contents of selected capillas over time often indicated the number of users at a selected site, as well as the purpose of the visit. Interviews with those familiar with the custom of capilla usage were also helpful in analyzing the significance of the shrine as a part of the cultural landscape.

Two capillas, one on Highway 85 and one on Highway 1, were selected for a more in depth study of shrine usage and traffic patterns. After several observations the Capilla del San Judas Tadeo near Nuevo Laredo and the Capilla de la Virgen de San Juan de Los Lagos in Lampazos were chosen as those having the greatest number of visitors on each highway. Data on traffic patterns at the two capillas were compiled by taking traffic counts over a two-day period at 9:00 AM, 1:00 PM and 5:00 PM for one hour. The number of trucks, buses and cars passing the shrine during the time period was recorded. Usage patterns were determined by noting the number of vehicles which stopped during the recording time. Observations were also recorded as to the number of persons in each vehicle, their sex and approximate age, and the length of the visit.

Finally, research into the history as well as the indigenous and Catholic religious practices of the region was conducted to identify features which might provide cultural earmarks.



## CHAPTER IV

### CRUCES - THE VERNACULAR ELEMENT

It might be accurately stated that a cruz is a cross or other monument erected alongside of the road to mark the location of a traffic fatality. This definition, however, does not convey the individuality expressed in the creation of these monuments. Small white crosses have been used in the United States along major roadways to mark incidents of traffic fatalities. These markers are generally put up by the state in areas of high accident risk to increase the awareness of drivers to potential danger. Cruces, on the other hand, are put up by the surviving family or friends of a traffic accident fatality. They therefore express individual tastes in the choice of what is appropriate.

Cruces may be placed by the family or by a compadre in the locality of the accident. The compadre is selected or hired by the family to erect and maintain the cruz for a limited number of years (Nutini, 1988). The family members may thus only visit the site once when the cruz is first placed. By erecting a cruz the family not only memorializes the site, but deflects the bad luck of the victim away from his community. The victims of accidents have a special place among the dead, at one time even having their own

feast day prior to the celebration of the feast day of adults during the festival of The Day of the Dead. Accident victims are not highly regarded as intermediaries between the living and the supernatural due to the unfortunate circumstances of their deaths.

No two cruces in the micro study area are identical unless they are placed side by side for members of the same family. Even these were often differentiated with name plaques. Moreover, finding identical cruces even under this circumstance is unusual. It is much more common to find a cluster of individual cruces unrelated in design at one site.

A cruz, due to this individuality, does not just identify a place where a fatality occurred. It instead identifies a place where a specific fatality occurred. A particular cruz by its design, color or shape is distinctly tied to a particular place and therefore sets that place apart from all other places. The frequent traveller along the roadway begins to note their relative locations just as he would note unusual natural outcrops, signs or vegetation as location markers. A typology of these roadside shrines provides a data base useful for comparisons across a wide area. Nonetheless, it does not capture the essence of individual space that the cruces exemplify. Typologies, in fact, may lull one into seeing a uniformity that does not exist. To thus avoid this potential problem, descriptions of individual cruces are offered in Appendix A.

### Cruz Distribution in Micro Area

Cruces mark the site of traffic fatalities. As such, one would expect to find the distribution of cruces correlating closely with road conditions conducive to accidents. Such areas would include regions around cities or major cross-country transportation routes where traffic is heavy. Two-lane highways, especially those with blind curves and inadequate shoulders, would be greater risks than four-lane thoroughfares. Driving habits of the typical road user would also have to be taken into consideration. Drivers on rural roadways hauling farm produce or taking the family to town would probably not drive at the speed of a cross-country trucker.

This study looks at the distribution of cruz sites, or the location of an accident, rather than at the locations of individual cruces in the study area for purposes of distribution analysis. The seventy-three cruces in the micro area are thus grouped into forty-eight cruz sites (Figure 11). It should be noted when discussing distribution of cruces in the micro area that the data may be skewed by recent road construction along Highway 1 to the north of Anahuac. The number of cruces destroyed along this twenty mile stretch cannot be determined.

When mapped, it becomes evident that the expectation of cruz site clustering in the vicinity of high risk traffic areas does not occur in the micro area. Sites near Nuevo

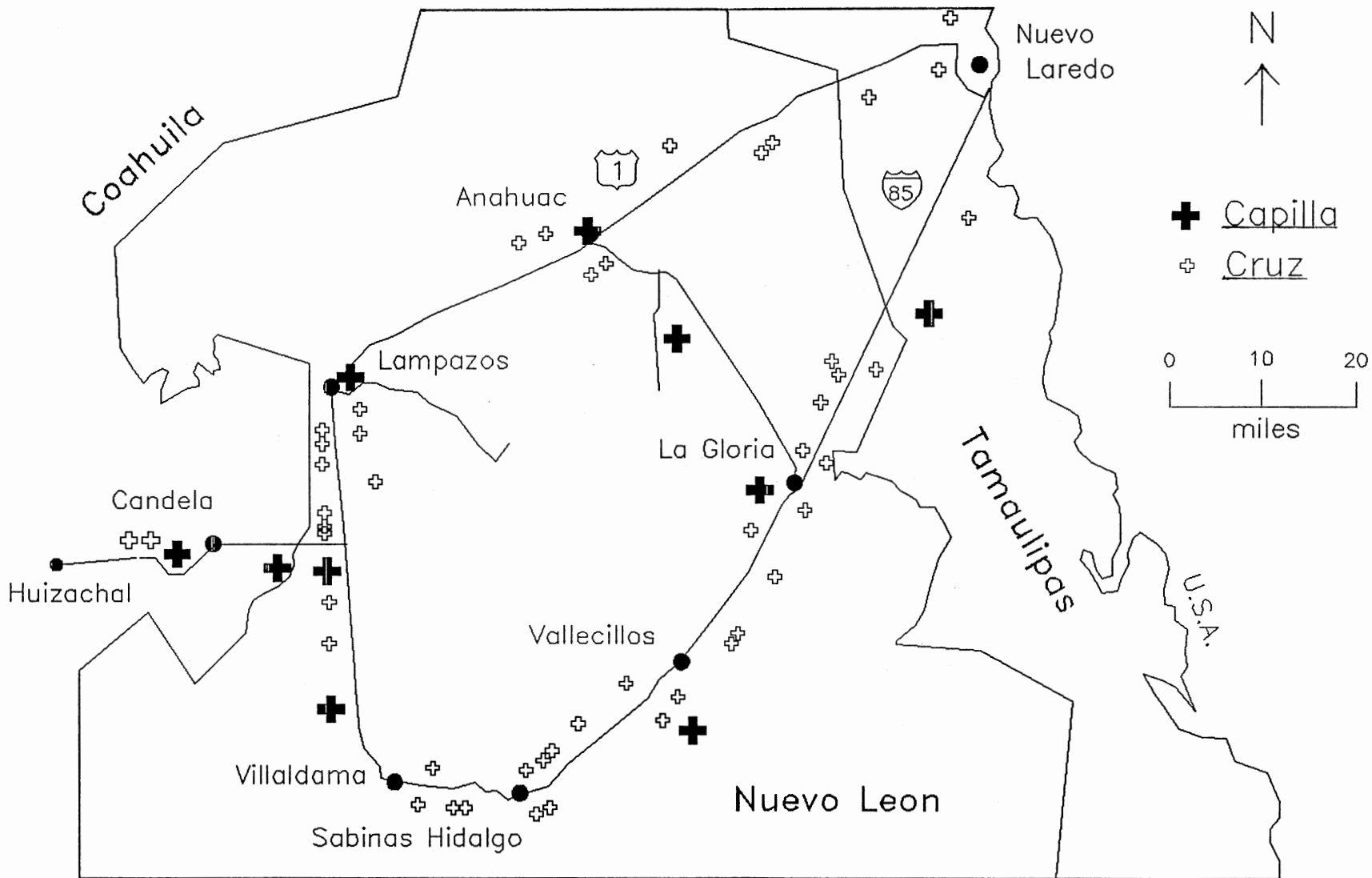


Figure 11. Roadside Shrine Sites in Micro Area

Laredo are almost nonexistent with only four sites within twenty miles of the city. A small cluster appears near Sabinas Hidalgo, the second largest city, but no more than around other much smaller villages. Other urban sites, such as Villaldama and Lampazos do not show any great increase in memorialized sites.

Overall road conditions likewise show little correlation with cruz site. Highway 85, Highway 1 and Highway 30 west of Candela are all two-lane highways with poor shoulders. The internal roads mapped are all gravel roads and have no cruces at all. The area with the greatest number of blind curves, and thus the greatest number of cruces, should be between Sabinas Hidalgo and Villaldama if cruz site was directly related to dangerous road conditions. However, the largest clustering of cruces occurs just south of Lampazos where conditions are relatively better.

The third variable, the amount and type of traffic on the highway, also fails to explain the distribution of sites. Highway 85, as part of the Pan American Highway, carries much more traffic than Highway 1. Traffic on the Pan American further involves a much greater number of trucks traveling at high speeds. Yet of the 48 sites less than half (21) are located on Highway 85. The other 27 sites are on highways with less and slower traffic.

It must be noted that although sites do not correlate well with poor road conditions overall, individual cruces

are often located on blind curves or hills which are not displayed on the map due to scale. It obviously is also the case that not every accident which has ever occurred is memorialized. Variables other than physical conditions must therefore be sought to explain distribution. Cultural variables considered in the micro area included the distance from the Mexico-USA border with its possible non-Hispanic influence and the occurrence of local versus transient traffic.

When one considers distance decay from the border, an obvious pattern emerges. Only 13, or 27%, of the sites occur within 50 miles of the Rio Grande. The greatest concentration of sites are at the farthestmost location from the border. There is evidence, therefore, that distance from the border may play a role in cruz site location.

Furthermore, the most transient traffic, that on the Pan American, is where the lack of expected cruces becomes most obvious. The local travellers of the less traveled Highway 1 seem to be more likely to commemorate an accident. A further division between north and south also appears within the distribution. This might have been dismissed in the micro area as a coincidence with other variables such as road construction and highway type if it had not been reinforced with the macro area study to be discussed later.

In conclusion, distribution of cruces within the micro area shows little of the correlation with what would be expected if only physical road conditions and traffic count

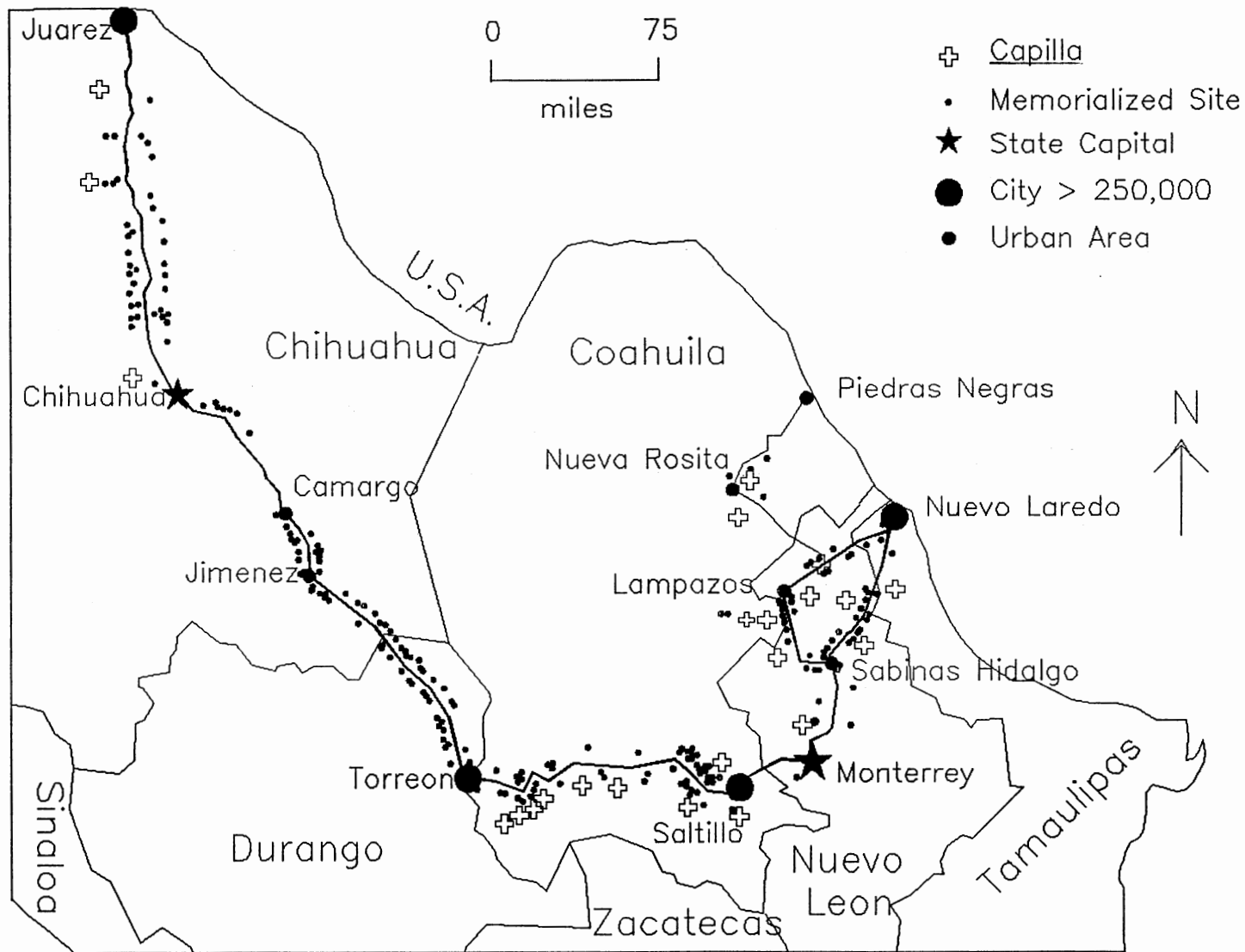


Figure 12. Roadside Shrine Sites in Macro Area

were taken into account. Cultural variables such as distance decay from the border and types of travellers on the road correlate much more closely to actual patterns of distribution. Local populations with limited influence from the border appear to be more likely to memorialize an accident site with a cruz.

#### Cruz Distribution in Macro Area

The same variables, both physical and cultural, were considered when examining cruz site distribution throughout the macro area (Figure 12). Clustering of sites does occur on some treacherous mountain highways. Yet the area between Sabinas Hidalgo and Monterrey is particularly winding and exhibits only four sites. On the other hand, the plateau highway between Torreon and Jimenez produced a large number of sites. Again, clustering does not occur near large cities. There is practically a void of cruces within fifty miles of Monterrey in either direction. It may also be observed that although the heavily traveled Pan American Highway north of Monterrey produced few sites, the highway going west showed numerous memorialized places.

Physical features thus may be used to explain locations of some individual sites, but overall patterns do not support a correlation strictly between terrain and cruz location. Once again, the more rural locations at the greatest distance from the border, the area between Torreon and Camargo, display the greatest concentration of cruces.



A distinct north-south pattern also appears as was mentioned in the micro area. This might be explained in the area north of and surrounding Chihuahua by the presence again of road construction and the existence of some four-lane highways which would reduce risk. However, it should be noted that the area north of and around Nueva Rosita displays the same pattern although there is no construction or four-lane highways in that area.

The border and urban phenomena can thus be seen as significant in placement of cruces. Both may indicate a turning away from tradition by those most influenced by the non-Hispanic culture to the north, for once the border is crossed the shrines become practically nonexistent. A tourist official in Monterrey when questioned about roadside shrines indicated little knowledge about the subject other than the fact that he did remember seeing them. The same response was obtained by those questioned from Laredo. Although new cruces continue to be placed, one may have to travel further into the interior as time goes on to observe them on the cultural landscape.

#### Material Composition of Cruzes

The cruz is often equated with the cemetery marker in terms of not only its purpose, but in appearance as well. Tours of cemeteries within the micro study area, however, showed there was a marked distinction between what type of memorial would be placed in a Hispanic Catholic cemetery and

TABLE I  
COMPOSITION OF CRUCES

Region	Stone		Metal		Wood		Other		Total #
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
North Macro	11	20	28	50	15	27	2	4	56
Central Macro	27	29	26	28	39	42	1	1	93
South Macro	19	21	24	27	45	50	2	2	90
East Macro	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0	4
Total Macro	60	25	79	33	99	41	5	2	243
Total Micro	33	45	23	32	13	18	2	3	73
Total	93	30	102	32	112	36	7	2	316

what would be used as a cruz. The cemetery headstone is in general much more ornate and personalized than the average cruz, although there is a transition between a common cemetery marker and an ornate cruz.

The most marked difference would be in the material composition of the monuments. Cemetery markers are most commonly made of stone. Sometimes wood crosses are used and occasionally metal crosses may be found, but the overall appearance of a Catholic cemetery is of stone crypts, headstones and statuary. Cruces, on the other hand, are equally likely to be made of stone, metal or wood. Sometimes even more short-lived material such as bundled straw is used (Table I).

Mapping of the material composition of the total 316 cruces in the expanded study area required that the macro area be further subdivided (Figure 13). The four macro subdivisions (north, central, south and east) and the micro region will be considered separately as to composition before being integrated with variables which may determine choice of material for a cruz.

The Northern Macro Area, from Juarez to Camargo, contains a total of 56 cruces (Figure 14). Half of all the monuments in this area are metal, by far the highest percentage of metal usage overall. The remaining are 20% stone, 27% wood and 2% other materials (Table I). The use of different materials is dispersed fairly evenly throughout the area.

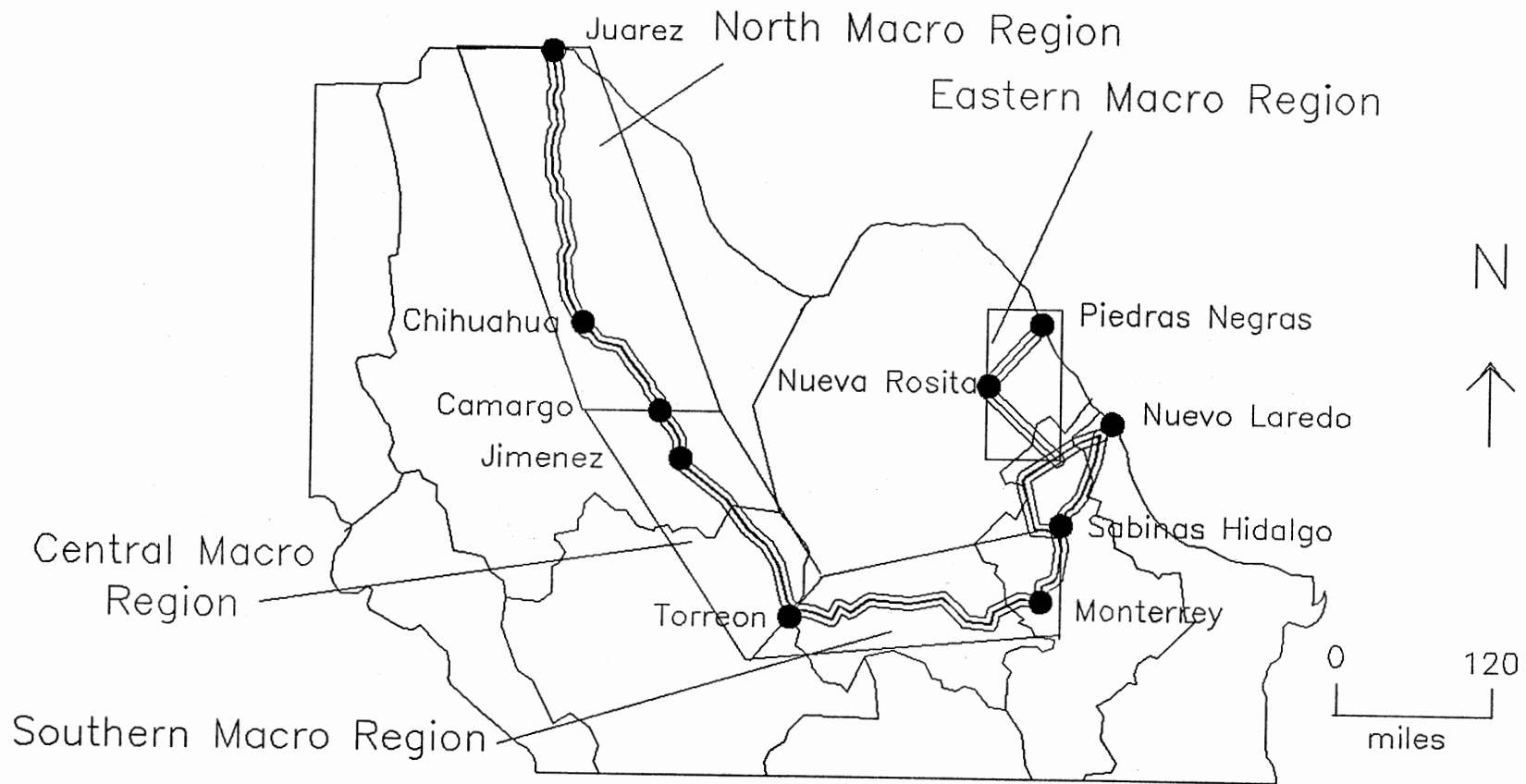


Figure 13. Divisions of Macro Region

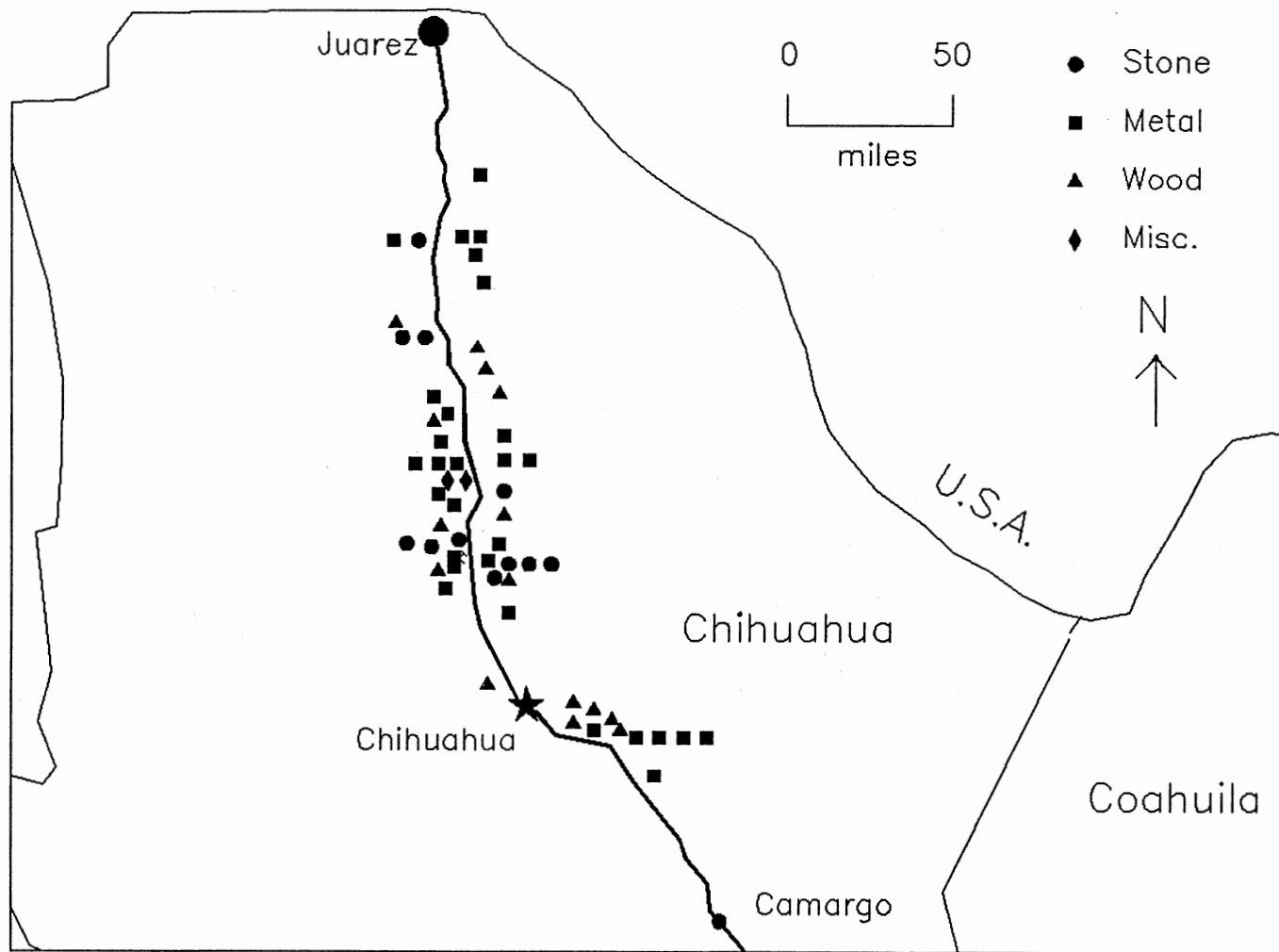


Figure 14. Cruz Composition in Northern Macro Area

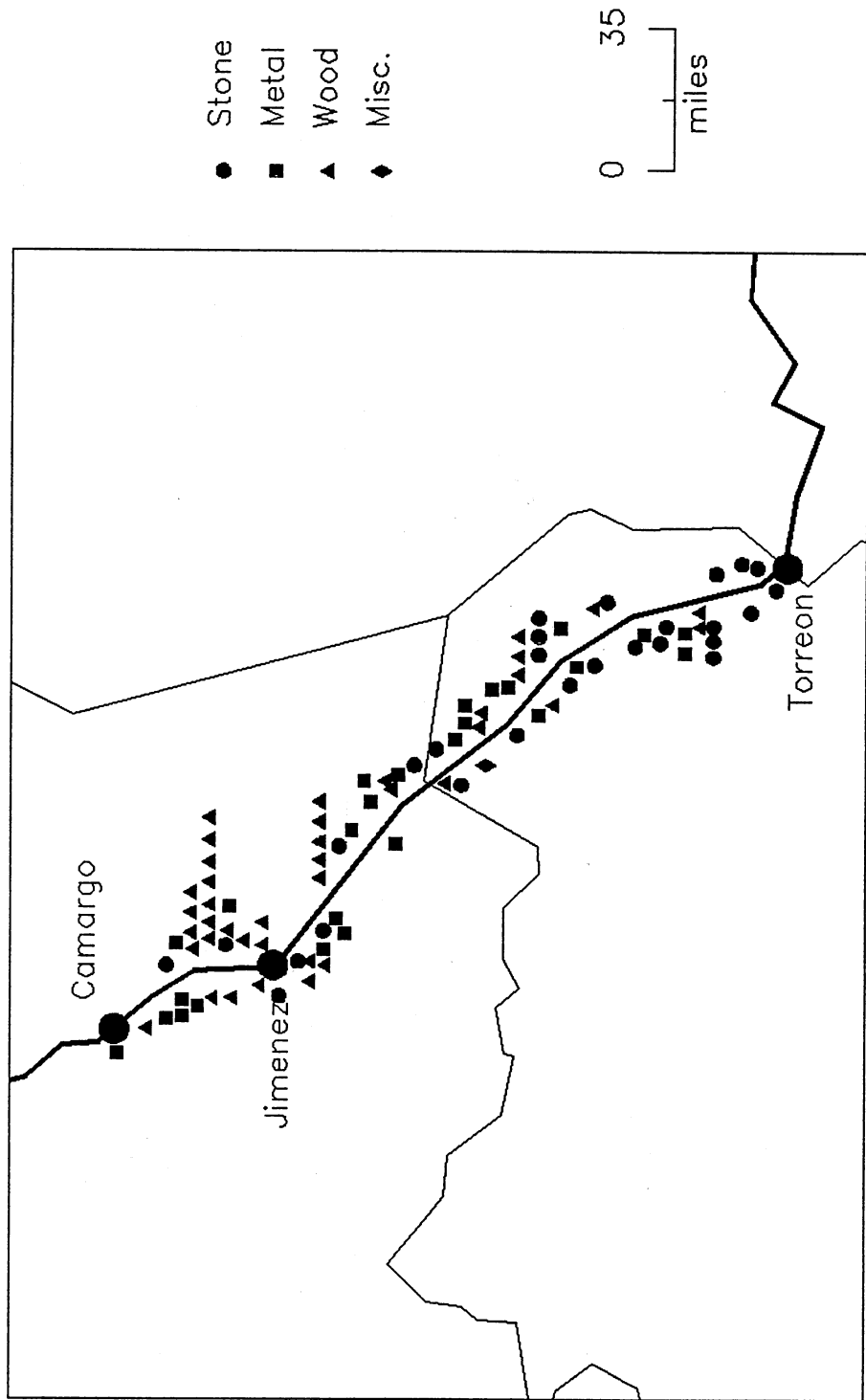


Figure 15. Cruz Composition in the Central Macro Area

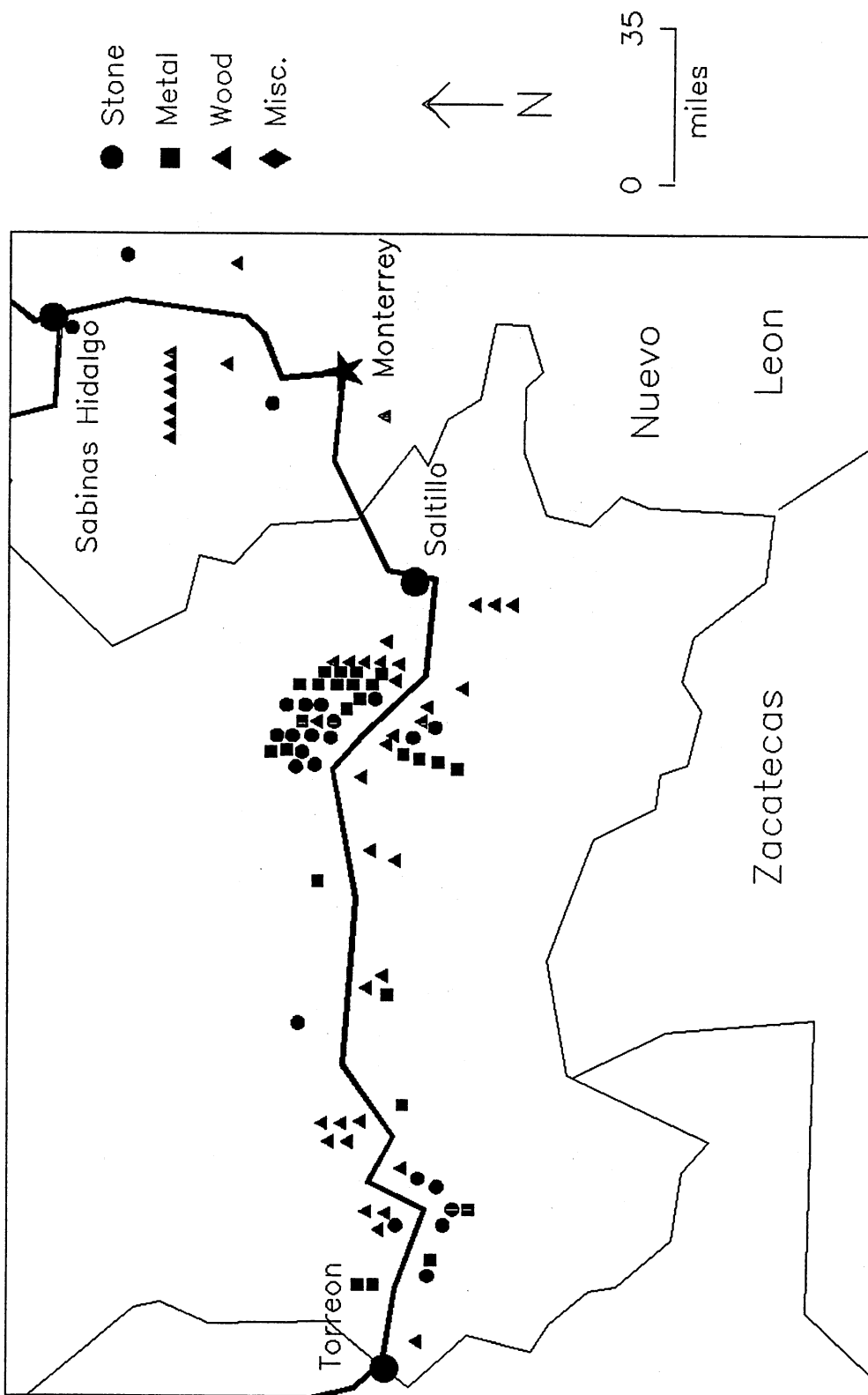


Figure 16. Cruz Composition in the Southern Macro Area

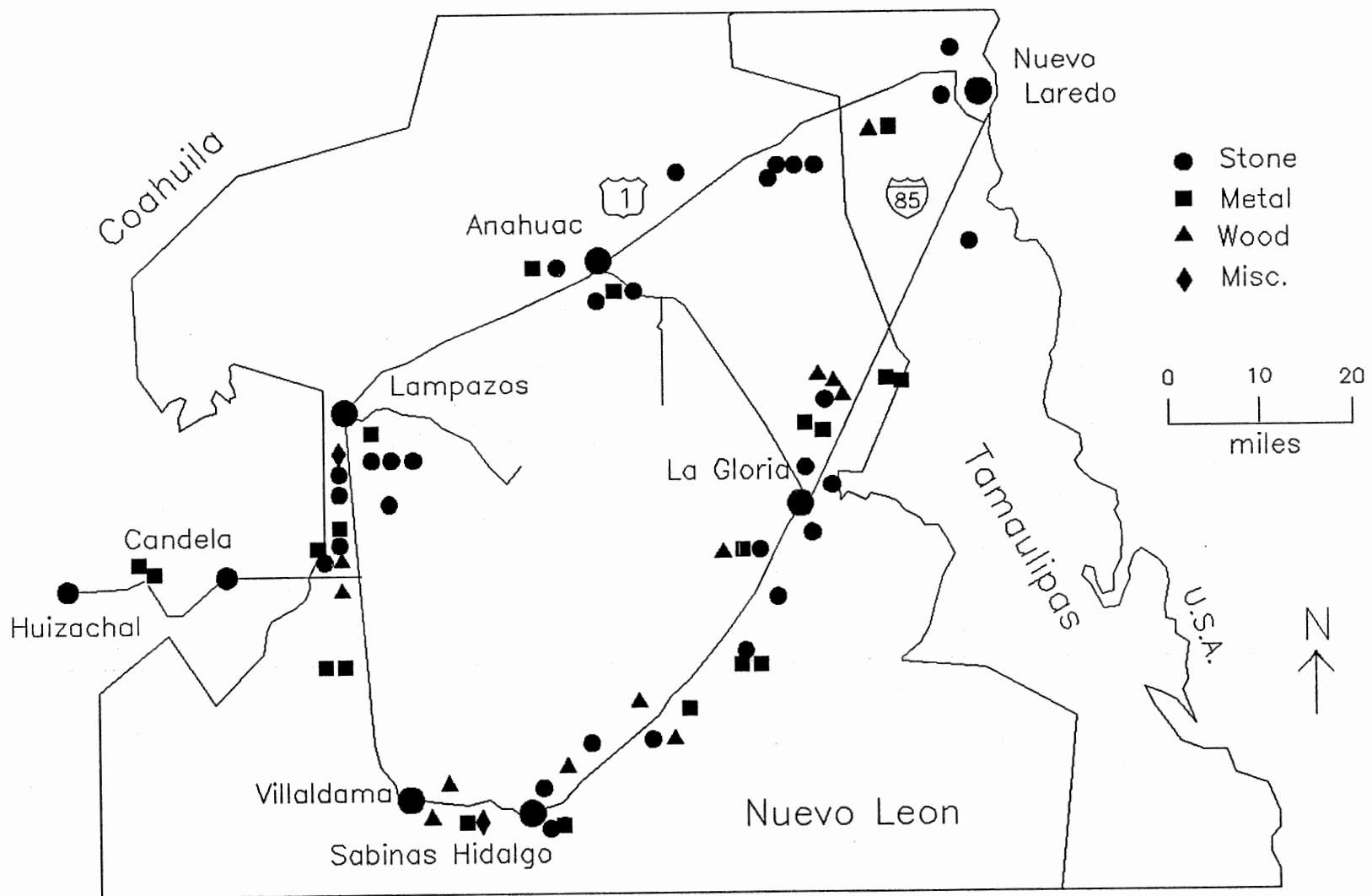


Figure 17. Composition of Micro Area Cruces





In contrast, metal is used in only 28% of the 93 cruces in the Central Macro Area (Figure 15). Use of stone is slightly more popular than in the north, accounting for 29% of the total. The most popular material in this area is wood, representing 42% (Table I). The only tiled cruz was also located in this central highland region.

The Southern Macro Area, from Torreon to Sabinas Hidalgo, contained 90 cruces, half of which were of wood (Figure 16). The remaining shrines were divided between stone (21%), metal (27%) and straw (2%) (Table I). The mountainous area west of Saltillo contained numerous multi-fatality cruz sites. This did not affect the preference for wood, although the percentages of all major composition materials were much more evenly distributed.

The Micro Study Area is notable for the large percentage of stone cruces; almost twice as many as in any other major area (Figure 17). Wood, as compared with other areas, is negligible with only 18% of the shrines being composed of this material. Metal as a construction component is comparable to the southern and central regions. Once again, straw was represented with 3% of the total. The preference for stone was slightly greater along Highway 1 (50% of all monuments were of stone) than along the Pan American Highway where only 43% of the monuments were of stone.

The East Macro Area contained only four cruces, three of stone and one of metal (Figure 18). The small

representation of this area did not permit accurate assessment of cruz composition. However, it may be noted that this area corresponds most closely with the northern half of the micro area where 56% of the cruces are composed of stone.

Altogether, cruz composition is basically evenly distributed over the entire study area among the three major composition materials: stone 30%, metal 32%, and wood 36% (Table I). Great variation exists, nonetheless, between different study areas. Stone and metal, the more permanent and expensive materials, predominate in the areas adjacent to the international border while wood predominates in the interior.

Expense, of course, would be a major consideration for cruz purchasers. Although some stone and metal cruces are handmade, the majority of them are commercially produced. Wooden memorials are more often simple handcrafted crosses. Available cash and the opportunity to purchase a cruz could be less accessible in the interior regions where urban centers are relatively far apart and paying jobs may be more scarce.

This does not explain the preference for stone in the east as opposed to metal in the north. Metalworking, however, is an old and popular craft in the northern region, especially around the region of Nogales (Griffith, 1988). Further examination of cruz typologies and capilla locations may perhaps shed more light on cultural variation to explain

TABLE II  
 COLOR OF CRUCES

COLOR	MICRO AREA		MACRO AREA		TOTAL	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
GREEN	2	3	2	1	4	1
BLACK	0	0	7	3	7	2
BLUE	4	5	28	12	32	10
RED	1	1	1	<1	2	1
YELLOW	0	0	3	1	3	1
MULTI-COLOR	2	3	1	<1	3	1
NATURAL/WHITE	64	88	201	83	265	84
TOTAL	73		243		316	

the distribution of cruz composition materials.

#### Distribution of Cruz Color

The vast majority of cruces are painted white or, in the case of stone cruces, left in the natural color. Over the entire study area only 16% of those who had put up cruces painted them some other color or even added decorative touches of color (Table II). When color is used, the most common choice is blue (10%). Other colors represented included green, red, yellow (1% each) and black (2%). Three cruces (1%) featured multi-colored designs.

The distribution of use of color raises interesting questions about the cultural importance of marking place in different regions. In the micro study area there are many more elaborate stone cruces than in the central highlands, which might lead to an assumption that marking place is of more importance since more effort and money is expended. The inland regions, however, show a marked increase in the number of monuments which use color. This would tend to indicate that economics plays more of a role than religious fervor. Those in the poorer sections of the country use what is available to provide uniqueness to their cruces. They use color.

#### Typologies of Micro Area Cruces

Micro area shrines were examined in greater detail to determine typologies of cruces. Features typed included

TABLE III  
STUDY AREA CRUZ DATES

DATE	NUMBER	PERCENT
1945-50	1	1
1951-55	0	0
1956-60	0	0
1961-65	0	0
1966-70	1	1
1971-75	2	3
1976-80	5	7
1981-85	18	25
1986-90	10	14
TOTAL KNOWN	37	51
TOTAL UNKNOWN	36	49

presence of a name plaque, planter or urn or pedestal. It was noted if a cruz was fenced or in some manner enclosed by a building or niche. Noted also was the presence of flowers or decorative ribbon placed on the cruz. Clustering was indicated by marking how many cruces stood individually and how many were part of a larger cruz site. Finally date of death was classified into five year cohorts to give an indication of cruz age.

Only 51% of cruces display a date of death on the marker (Table III). Of these 76% are within the last ten years. Dating of cruces falls off sharply with an additional 10% contained in the next two cohorts, totaling 86% of dates falling within the preceding 20 years. Only two markers displayed dates before 1970; one in 1969 and one in 1948.

With 49% of the cruces showing no date of death, it is difficult to hypothesize why so few cruces seem to be over 20 years old. Either it was not common to put dates on cruces before this era, or older cruces simply are not maintained. It would seem that the latter is the more likely answer. Maintenance of cruces depends on the immediate survivors of the victims. After two generations it would not seem unusual that there would be few relatives left to maintain the shrine. Grandchildren may well not take the time to replace or repair a cruz for relatives they did not know.

A small majority of the cruces (66%) display a name on

TABLE IV  
 FEATURES OF STUDY AREA CRUCES

FEATURE	PRESENT	NOT PRESENT	% PRESENT
NAME PLAQUE	48	25	66
PLANTER/URN	18	55	25
PEDASTEL	40	33	55
FENCED	3	70	4
ENCLOSED	4	69	5
FLOWERS	35	38	50
RIBBON	5	68	7
MORE THAN ONE CRUZ AT SITE	19	54	26





Figure 19. Cruz Placed on Crypt Base



Figure 20. Straw Cruz and Cruz with Crucifix

the cruz (Table IV). On wooden cruces this is most commonly a name painted in black on the crossbar. Metal cruces often have a flat plate welded on with painted lettering. Stone cruces generally have the name engraved, although a painted name is not uncommon. A few memorials will also include other text in the inscription such as "brother" or "daughter". Long epitaphs are, however, not a general practice.

The majority of cruces in the micro area also were placed on some type of pedestal. Pedestals might consist of loosely piled stones around the base of a simple cross. Most often they are concrete bases from two to three foot high. These may be poured from concrete or formed from composite stone. A small number of cruces were placed atop concrete crypts such as might be found in a cemetery (Figure 19).

Planters or urns are present in 25% of the cruces. Planters may be formed as part of the base of the shrine or may be just containers placed before or beside the monument. Often a tin can will serve as a repository for flowers. Three shrines contained an engraved image of Jesus with a crown of thorns. The only other notable decoration incorporated into cruz design was the crucifix (Figure 20). These were found on both metal and stone cruces.

More than half of the shrines in the micro area were ornamented with flowers or ribbons (Table IV). Artificial flowers are found in most cases, but evidence of live

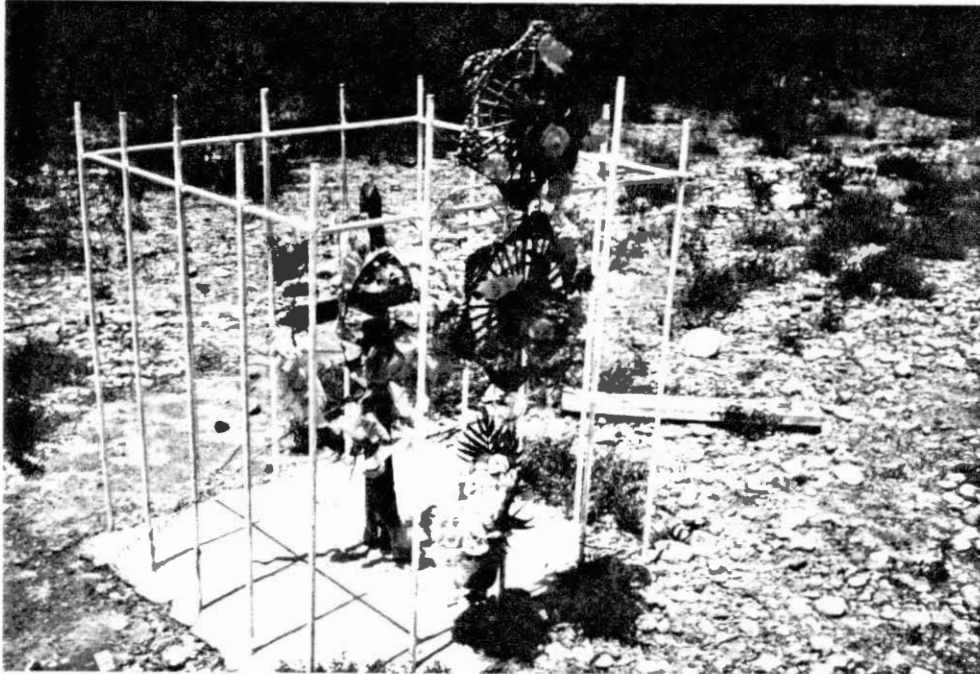


Figure 21. Fenced Wooden Cruz

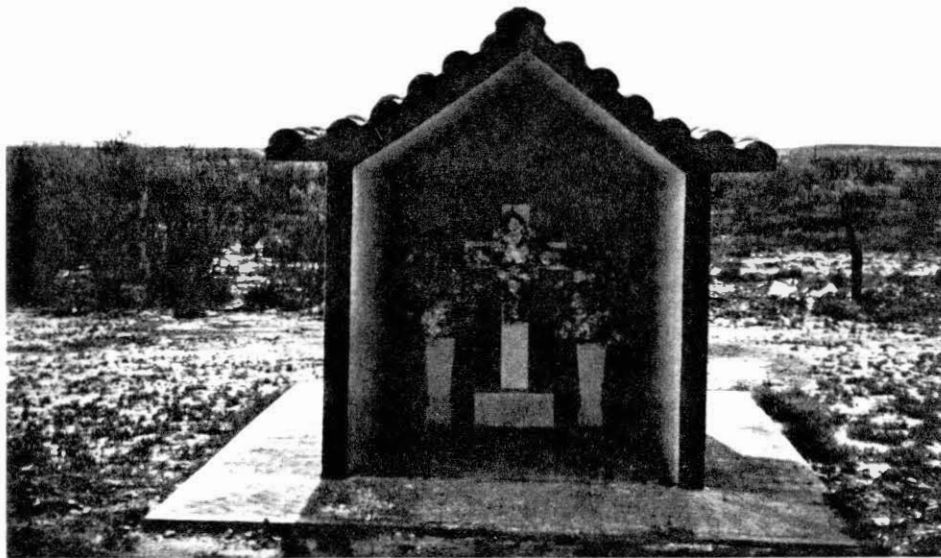


Figure 22. Cruz in Tile Roofed Enclosure

flowers remains on many cruces. Flowers may be hung in wreathes over the top of a cross or more often tied in a bundle and placed in a vase or urn. Many times bundles of flowers are simply tied to the cross. Throughout the study period, from March through October, there was little significant change in the number of cruces with flowers.

Only nine percent of the cruces in the micro area are fenced or enclosed. Three are enclosed by wrought iron fences (Figure 21). It is interesting to note that these three all have inscriptions indicating that the victim had been a child. Three of the cruces are of the niche type with an enclosed area for the placement of flowers or candles. The remaining enclosure is a small tile-roofed building housing a cross flanked by tall urns (Figure 22). This memorial is also unique in that the area immediately surrounding the building has been landscaped with perennial flowering bulbs providing a continuous splash of color.

A cruz generally will stand alone. Of the monuments in the micro area, 74% showed no indication that more than one fatality could have occurred at the site; one cross marked one place. At some sites, however, multiple cruces exist. Some of these cruz sites are the site of multiple deaths; each cruz contains a different name (Figure 23). At other sites it is questionable whether more than one fatality occurred. Cruces unrelated in appearance may be placed directly in front of each other as if one cruz has replaced another. At one location four crosses of different



Figure 23. Cruz Site with Three Fatalities

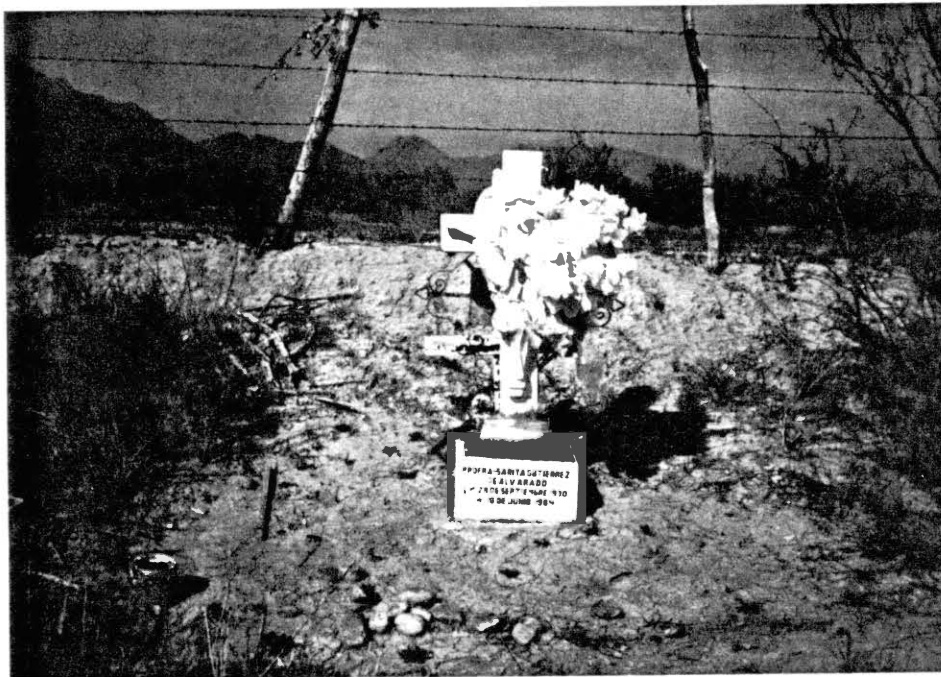


Figure 24. New Cruces Replacing Old



Figure 25. Large, Ornate Monument



Figure 26. Evidence of an Ongoing Custom  
 Added to Study Area Fall of 1990

materials are located, each one hiding the one behind it (Figure 24). It would seem that the monument has been 'updated' through the years, but the older cruces have not been removed. Once the location is marked, survivors seem reluctant to remove the original marker.

In summary, the vast majority of cruces in the micro area were recent additions to the cultural landscape. The locational marker is generally put in place promptly by the mourners. An accident witnessed by the author in May had been memorialized with a large whitewashed concrete marker by October (Figure 25). Another new marker observed in October was placed behind remains of burned grass and shattered glass (Figure 26).

The cruces mark place. Although many of the monuments do contain names, having the name of the victim known does not seem to be as important as having the site individualized. Each cruz shows enough variety to identify the location to those to whom the location has significance; friends, family and, of course, the victim. Perhaps no other cultural landscape marker in the public domain is so private yet so indicative of the culture at large.



## CHAPTER V

### CAPILLAS - RELIGIOUS RESTSTOPS

Capillas, as defined in this study, are small buildings housing religious artifacts or encased displays depicting religious scenes which are put up on the roadway in honor of holy personages. It is recognized that strictly translated a capilla is a shrine and may be located within a home or on private property. These shrines are the case for a different study. Roadside shrines by definition must be located on the roadway and be open for public use.

According to Eduardo Chavazos, an American resident of Bustamante, Mexico, a capilla is generally built by a community to honor the patron saint of the village, thus capillas in this study are most often identified by the name of the town which maintains them. Money collected through donations made at the capilla may be used to celebrate the festival day of the patron saint (Chavazos, Personal Communication, May 1990). Capillas may also be built by individuals, often by large ranch owners which constitute a type of community. The shrines are for the use of those in the community if they so desire. However, it is the transient traveller who will stop at the capilla to light a candle, say a prayer, ask a blessing or make an offering.



Capillas take the place of the church when one is too far from home to pay homage in the traditional manner. Capilla location and usage, therefore, is related as much to the highway as it is the community in which it is found.

#### Capilla Usage

The capilla is built to honor a saint or holy person. Visitors to the capilla may ask for the intervention of the saint in a multitude of affairs or simply seek a blessing or give thanks for past blessings bestowed. It is also customary for travellers to begin a journey by asking safe passage and to end the journey by giving thanks (Chavazos, Personal Communication, May 7, 1990). If a person is near home they may use the local church for this purpose. If, however, they are far from home they may stop at a capilla to fulfill this tradition. Capilla users are often truck drivers or long distance travelers.

Two capillas were selected in the study area in which to observe patterns of shrine usage. The Capilla del San Judas Tadeo was chosen because of its location on the Pan American Highway and because it exhibited a large volume of traffic. The Capilla de la Virgen de San Juan de Los Lagos was selected on Highway 1. At each shrine a count was made of the total volume of traffic on the highway and the number of people who stopped during one hour periods in the morning, afternoon and evening. Observations of the sex and age of users was also recorded along with notes on

practices of individuals.

The Capilla de la Virgen de San Juan de Los Lagos had no more than two visitors per hour at any time of day. Traffic on the highway was light, with not more than a dozen cars passing in an hour. Most of the faithful brought fresh flowers; some brought candles. All visitors to the capilla crossed before entering. The average length of stay was less than five minutes. Workmen from the surrounding construction project used the shady porch during their lunch break. Secular uses of capillas is a common occurrence. Observations were made of capillas being used by armed soldiers for shade during traffic checks. Some truck drivers were also observed stopping before a capilla to stretch their legs but never actually entering the structure. The shrines may thus serve the purpose of an American highway rest stop in addition to their religious significance.

The Capilla del San Judas Tadeo is much more heavily used than any other shrine in the study area. Approximately 60 vehicles per hour passed before the structure during peak hours. Up to 10% of these stopped at the capilla. During the morning between 7:00 and 9:00 approximately 50% of the traffic on the highway was trucks. By 9:00 more than 70 candles were glowing inside the shrine. Traffic slowed during the day, then increased again toward evening.

Visitors observed at the capilla were of both sexes, and ranged widely in age. Families would stop and the

children would wait while one or both of their parents lit a candle. A young couple kneeled before the shrine before entering to say a prayer. Two women stopped and made their way through the mud in black heels to place flowers before the images of the saints. Another couple stayed long enough to sweep the shrine with a broom kept next to the door, although they were simply passersby who had never visited the shrine before. Truckers lit candles. A middle-aged couple stopped to allow an aging parent to say a prayer. The capilla draws a wide variety of visitors.

#### Distribution of Capillas

A total of 25 capillas were located within the study area, 10 in the micro area and an additional 15 in the macro area. The larger concentration of capillas in the micro area is perhaps due in part to a more thorough traversing of the interconnecting rural roadways within this area. It should be noted that capillas are much more concentrated along the more heavily travelled highways between Nuevo Laredo and Torreon than in the central regions (Figure 27). Three hypotheses may explain this. The central region is not heavily populated. Those villages that do exist are generally composed of less than a dozen houses. The village church may be located conspicuously on the highway and thus the need for a capilla is met. Lack of a significant amount of transient traffic may be a second factor in the absence of capillas in this region. There are few places to

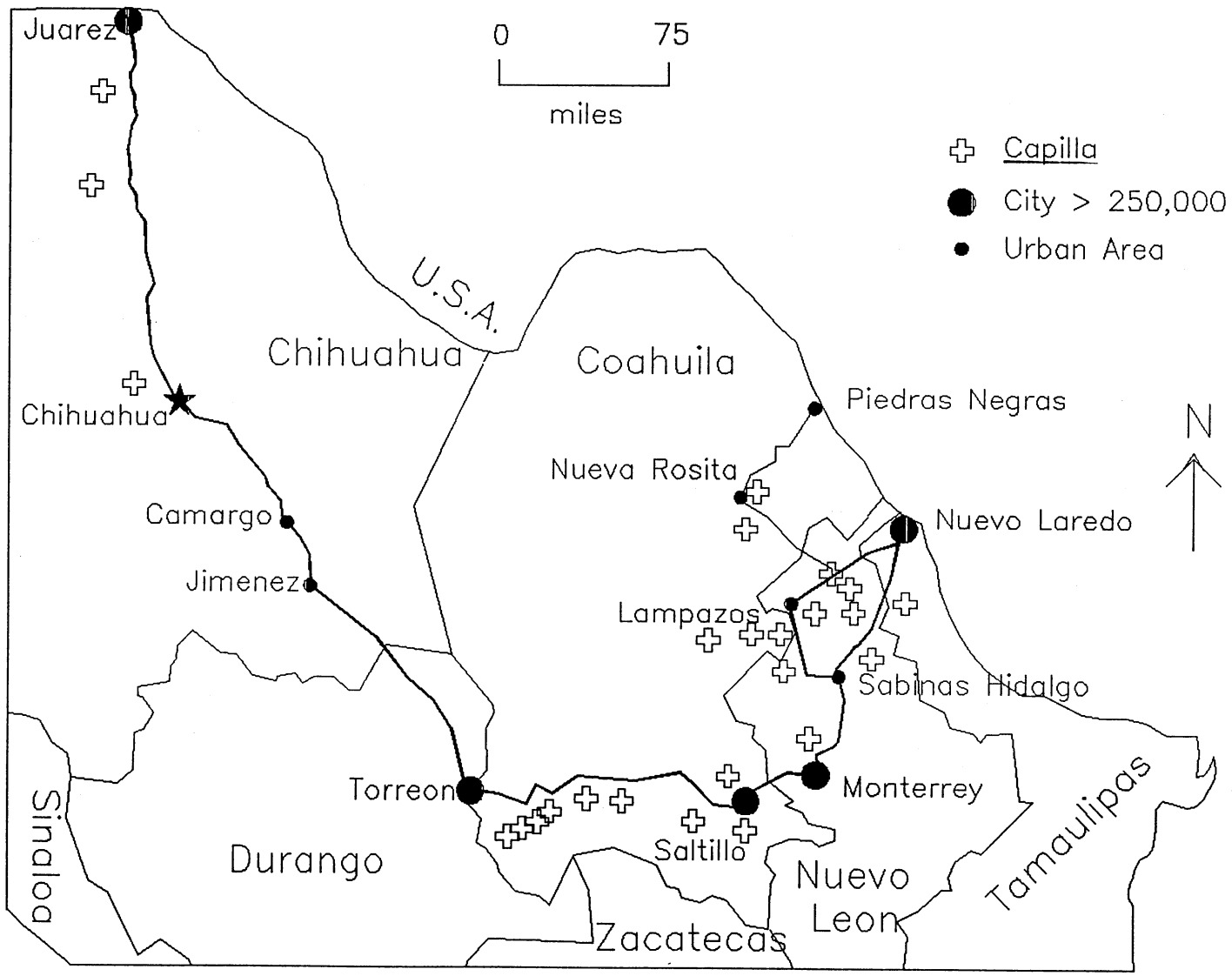


Figure 27. Capilla Sites in Macro Area

stop for the night between Chihuahua and Torreon. The third reason for the lack of capillas on the highway in this area may be the many large ranches in the region. As there is little transient traffic, capillas may be located within the ranch for use by the community just as they are found in many rural locations within the micro region.

Within the micro region capillas are evenly distributed among the various road types (Figure 28). Three of the shrines are located on the Pan American Highway, four are on Highway 1, two are on a rural highway and one is on a gravel road. Eight of the shrines are small buildings with an open front or doorway which may be entered by visitors. The hilltop capilla is open in the front but not large enough to actually permit entry. The Anahuac capilla is an encased shrine within a street wall.

Every community within the micro area has a capilla located on the highway with the exception of Nuevo Laredo, Sabinas Hidalgo, Villaldama and Huizachal. The first two are large enough to be cities, which might explain a lack of community cohesion necessary for a capilla. It is possible that the Villaldama capilla may be located south of town towards Monterrey. This highway was not investigated. Huizachal has only a few houses and has a church located just off the highway which may serve as a capilla. The town of Candela has two capillas, one on Highway 1 and one on Highway 35. One shrine in the study area, the Capilla of John the Baptist, is maintained by a ranch rather than a

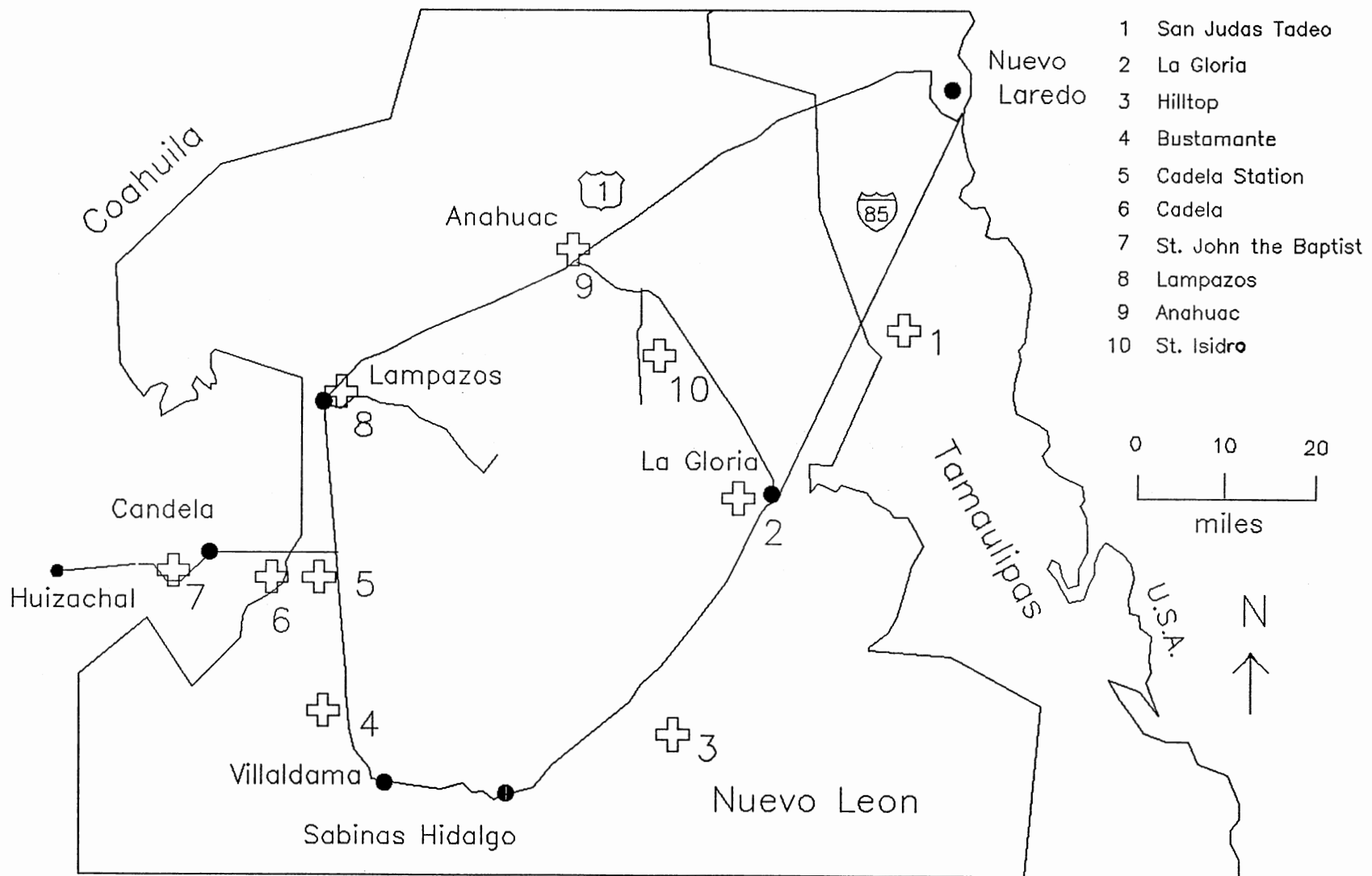


Figure 28. Capillas in Micro Area

village. None of the capillas, with the exception of the encased shrine in Anahuac, is located directly in the central part of town. They tend more to be on the outskirts where traffic can pull off the highway with a minimum amount of disturbance. Most are actually a mile or more from town.

Location of roadside capillas thus depends on the presence of a community large enough to support a shrine, yet not necessarily a city.

#### Analysis of Capilla Contents

Contents of capillas vary from site to site and over time within one shrine. One may expect to find religious artifacts, flowers and candles. Personal items left at capillas by visitors range from business cards to leg casts (Figure 29). Contents of the ten capillas in the micro area were examined to determine the frequency of saints represented and religious items associated with the saint. Personal items left in the capilla were noted in an attempt to correlate habits of worship with individual saints.

The first capilla in the study area, the Capilla del San Judas Tadeo, is fascinating not only because of the large number of items contained within the shrine but also due to the constant change in content. The capilla is a regular stop for as many as one hundred visitors every day. Truck drivers, travelers and local traffic stop to say a prayer, ask a blessing or give thanks, leaving numerous personal and religious artifacts in the shrine.



Figure 29. Photographs and Business Cards Surrounding the Virgin of Guadalupe

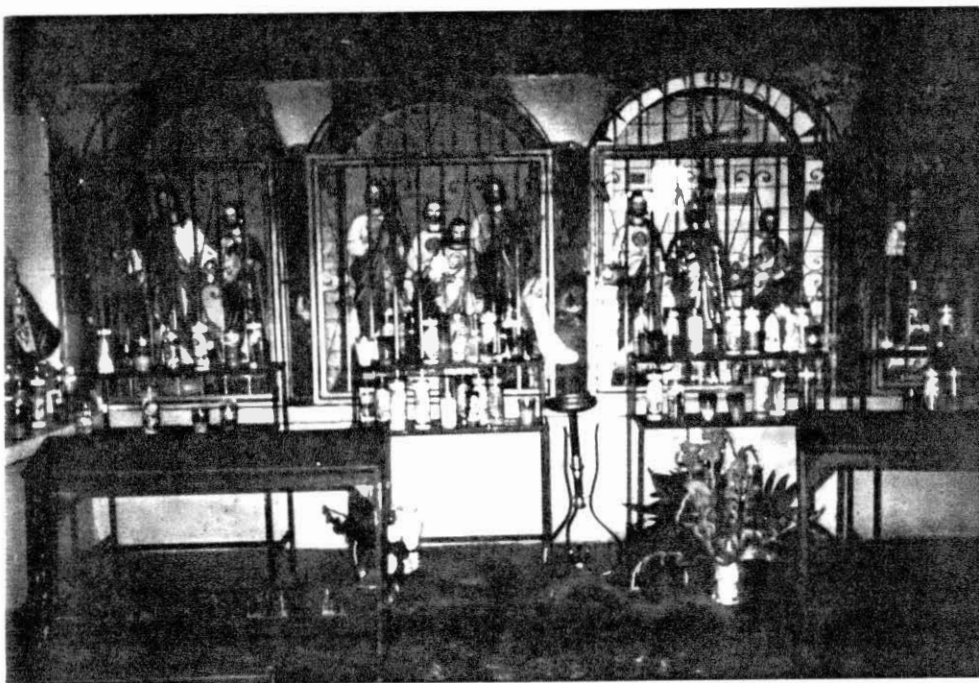


Figure 30. Display of Images in Niches  
Capilla del San Judas Tadeo



The shrine contains ten images of St. Jude, half of which stand over three feet high and are contained in niches behind wrought iron gates (Figure 30). Shelves along the sides of the shrine hold images of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos, Virgin Mary, and Jesus as a child and with the Sacred Heart (Figures 31 & 32). Fresh flowers are arranged on the floor and on shelves before the saints. Tiered shelves in the front hold candles - at times 50 to 70 may be flickering before the icons.

Personal items left by the faithful adorn walls, shelves and the saints themselves. An inventory of items includes rosaries, hospital bracelets from newborns, locks of hair, photographs, business cards, driver's licenses, casts, baby shoes, drawings, coins and jewelry. Photographs are tucked into frames surrounding the virgins or hung from the arms and hands of the saints. Items are hung from the wrought iron grating or placed along the shelves. On one shelf is a stack of papers, chain letters imploring the visitor to make ten copies and send them to friends or suffer the wrath of the saints. The capilla is like a living memorial to the problems and concerns of the average man. Whichever direction one turns, new stories are revealed, unique to one individual yet common to all.

The La Gloria capilla is a more typical shrine. Wooden benches face a front alter decorated with flowers, candles and icons. Miniature Christmas lights draped around the front wall and a gold tin foil wreath lend a festive air.



Figure 31. Candles and Flowers Offered  
The Virgin of Guadalupe and St. Jude.



Figure 32. Candles Placed before Images  
of the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos

(Figure 34). The capilla is dedicated to Sagrado Corazon del Jesus. As in most capillas several holy personages are represented within the shrine including St. Jude, the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos, Jesus with a crown of thorns, San Martin de Porres and the Virgin Mary.

The hilltop capilla above Vallecillos could be mistaken for a cruz if it were not for its location. It is a small three-sided structure placed high on a hilltop; a good ten minute's walk up the road above the village cemetery (Figure 33). It obviously could not mark the location of a traffic fatality, so must be placed in the capilla class. The interior of the structure is only four feet wide, three feet deep and five feet tall, which does not allow for entry into the shrine for an adult. There are three steps leading up into the interior, however, as if entry were encouraged. This feature, steps leading into a miniature or encased shrine, is found at several locations in the macro area as well.

There is no icon in the capilla and writing on the frontpiece has become illegible with time, so the patron saint of the shrine is unknown. The capilla was filled with fresh and artificial flowers placed before several large white crosses. Candles had been placed before the central cross. Being less accessible than other capillas seen from the road, this shrine probably served primarily the needs of the community rather than transient traffic.

The Bustamante capilla is a very plain white



Figure 33. Hilltop Capilla  
above Vallecillos

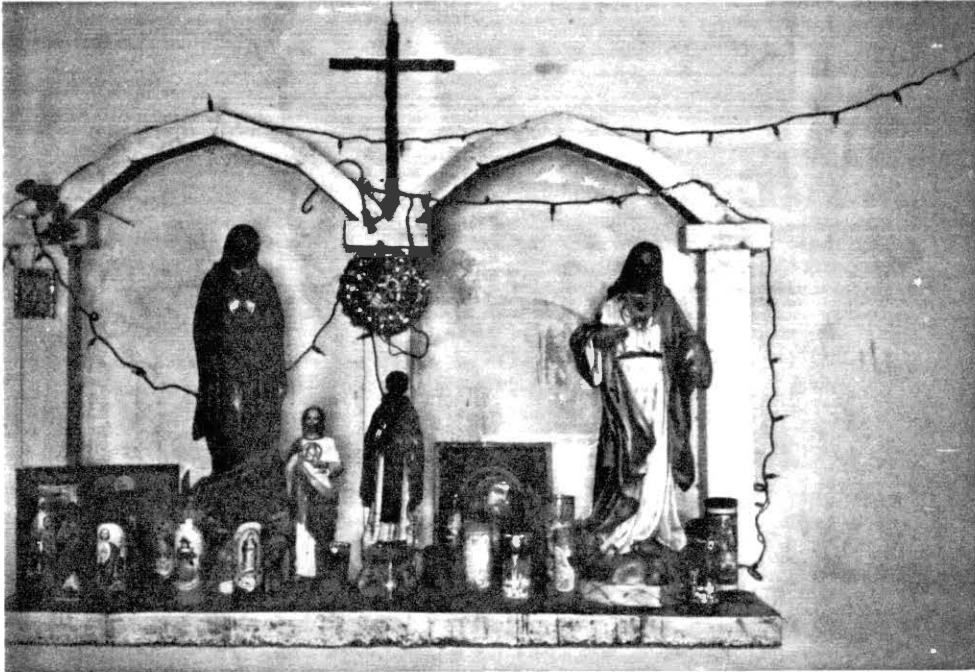


Figure 34. The Virgin of Guadalupe,  
St. Jude, San Martin de Porres, Jesus  
Capilla del Corazon del Jesus

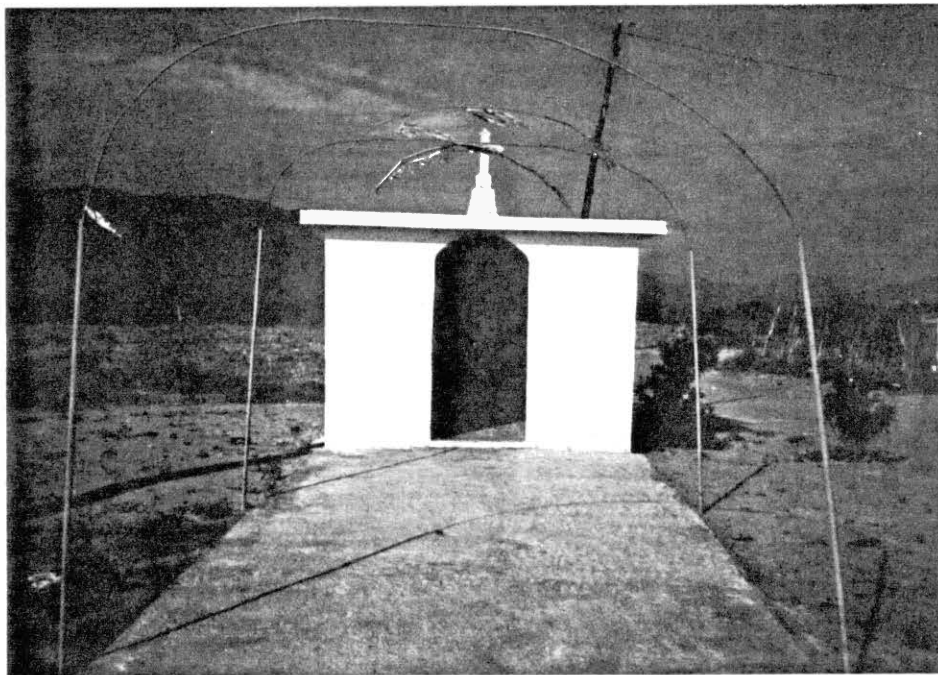


Figure 35. Capilla of Bustamante

building with pipe arches forming a walkway before it (Figure 35). Only the stone cross on top designates it as a capilla. The interior is as austere as the exterior. The Virgin of Guadalupe, Jesus and St. Jude are represented in icons or pictures. There is no altar. Instead, small shelves covered with hand-made doilies hold images and a single vase of flowers (Figure 36). Pictures are hung on walls. Although the capilla is easily accessible from the highway, it contained no candles or personal artifacts.

The Capilla de Candela and the Capilla de Candela Estacion are only a few miles apart. The latter, on Highway 1, features a long porch with benches before the entrance. Tiled pictures of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Jesus hang on either side of the door (Figure 37). Inside a large tiled picture of San Martin de Porres, a monk of Indian descent who worked with the poor and was much revered, hangs above a red brick shelf and altar. Candles and flowers have been placed below it.

The Candela capilla is much larger and more ornate (Figure 38). Images of four holy personages were identified in the shrine: St. Jude, St. Cecilia, the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos and a Franciscan monk (Figure 39). The Franciscans were the first order to minister to the Indians in this area. They were much respected by the indigenous population (Braden, 1966). Other religious orders followed, but none achieved the success in winning the hearts of the people as did the Franciscans. It is thus fitting that

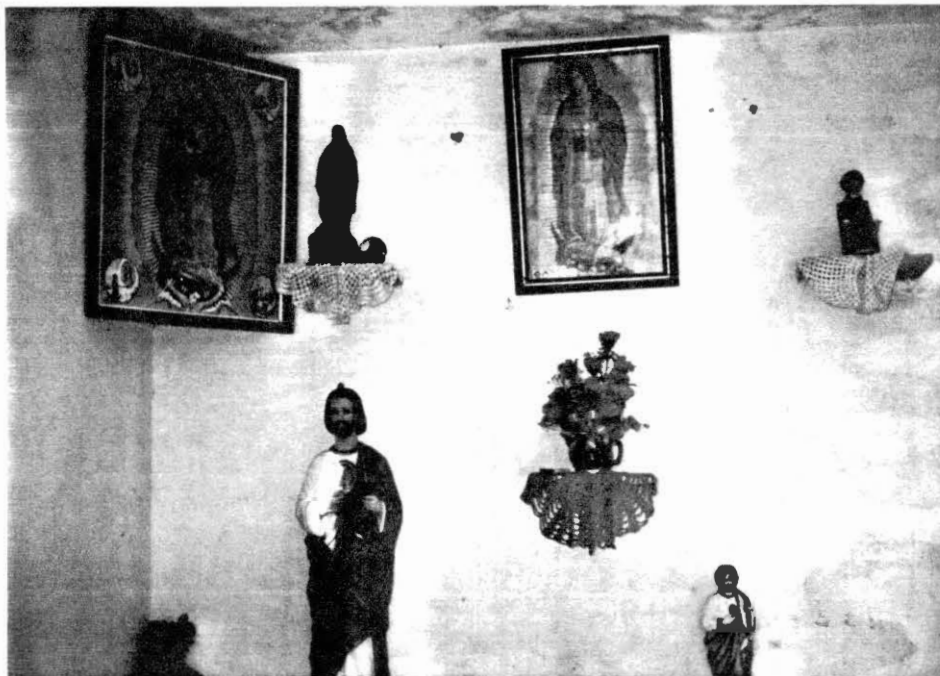


Figure 36. The Virgin of Guadalupe, St. Jude  
& Unidentified Franciscan (seated)  
Capilla at Bustamante



Figure 37. Capilla at Candela Station

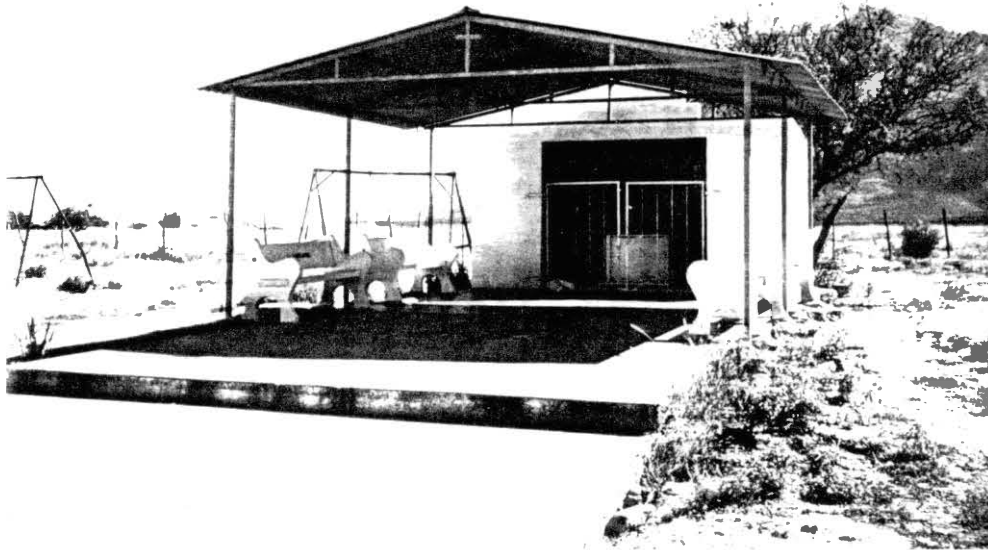


Figure 38. Capilla at Candela



Figure 39. Portrait of Monk, Candela Capilla



images of Franciscan monks are found in two capillas. The capilla is filled with flowers and candles. Four large books contain the names of thousands of visitors to the shrine. Some personal artifacts are tucked into the hands of saints or posted on the walls. St. Jude holds a lock of hair, several rosaries, and a towel. Many photographs are hung behind the saints as well as locks of hair and old driver's licenses.

The capilla acts as a bus stop as well as a religious shrine. Four large benches under a broad awning in front hold waiting commuters. It seems most fitting that before getting on one of the roaring Zua Zua buses that one would want to say a prayer.

The Capilla of St. John Baptist is a tiny five by six foot building placed next to the gateway of a large ranch (Figure 40). A portrait of St. John hangs above the altar (Figure 41). Small figures depicting Jesus, Don Pedrito, John the Baptist and St. Jude are arranged on the altar amidst flowers and candles.

Don Pedrito was a faith healer much venerated in western Texas. His appearance in the Capilla of St. John illustrates close ties between northeast Mexico and western Texas (Arreola, personal communication, November, 1990).

One of the most beautiful shrines is the Capilla of the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos in Lampazos. A long winged roof covers a red and white tiled porch before the ornate iron door of the shrine (Figure 42). The only figure

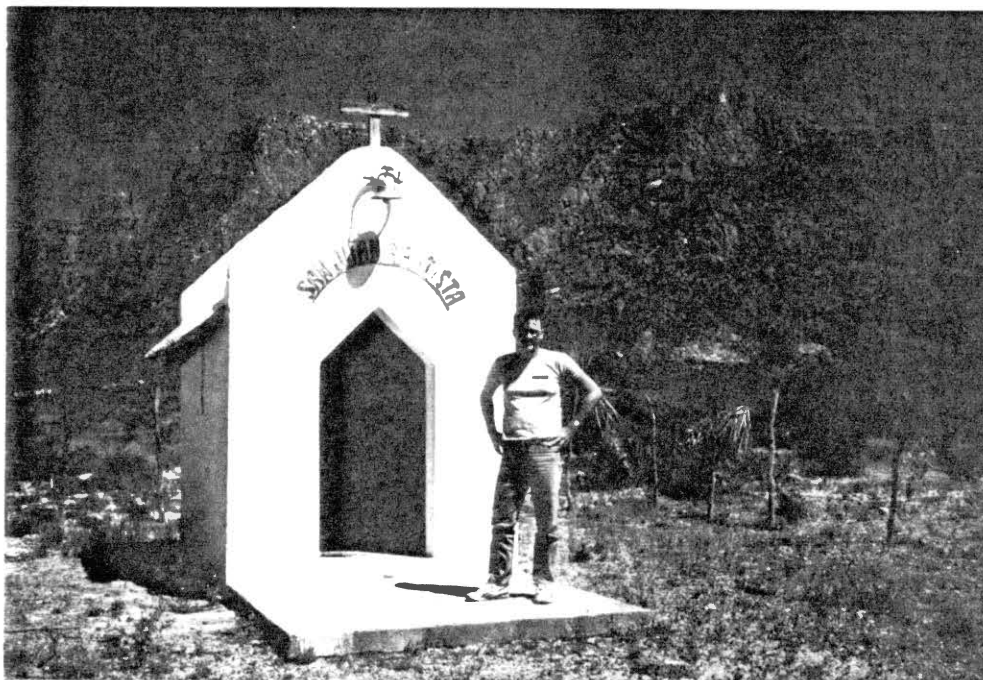


Figure 40. Capilla of St. John the Baptist



Figure 41. Portrait of St. John  
Capilla of St. John the Baptist

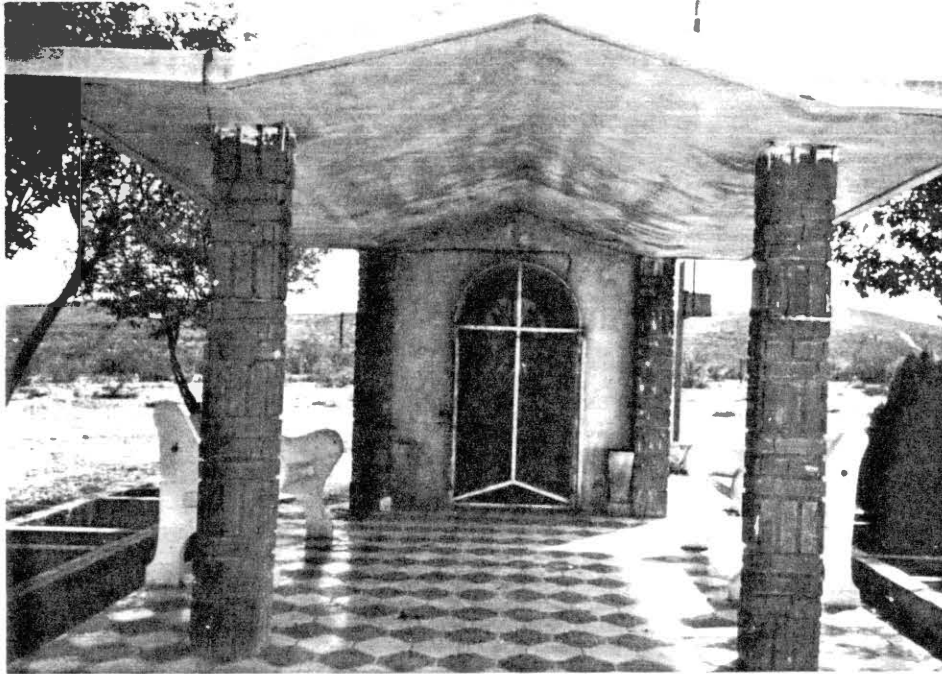


Figure 42. Capilla at Lampazos



Figure 43. The Virgin of San Juan  
de Los Lagos

represented in the capilla is the Virgin, encased in a wooden showcase (Figure 43). Unlike other capillas in the study area, this shrine shows considerable architectural skill in its construction. Stone archways support the shelf holding the showcase. Precisely laid stone blocks form the walls. Another showcase hangs on a side wall, filled with locks of hair and long braids. Fresh flowers fill every corner and candles are placed before the icon. Coins are placed in the polished wood alter. The shrine is truly elegant.

The Capilla of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Anahuac is much simpler. An enclosed showcase placed upon a wall facing the street holds the image of the Virgin. A cascading arrangement of rock has been laid before the image forming a base. Flowers and candles are attached to an archway over the shrine or placed upon the rocks.

The final capilla in the study area is the Capilla del San Isidro located on a rural road in the agricultural region bordering the Rio Salado. The shrine features a large bell hung above the doorway and the image of St. Isidro, the patron saint of farmers. A thatched roof covers the porched area in front. The capilla was under repair during the study period, so other images which might have been contained within are unknown. There are a total of 59 images contained in the 10 shrines in the micro region, representing 12 different holy personages (Table V). The most common figure is St. Jude, appearing 21 times in five

different shrines. The Virgin is represented 19 times; as the Virgin of Guadalupe nine times, the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos seven times and the Virgin Mary three times. Jesus, surprisingly, is found only 11 times; once as a child, four times with a crown of thorns or crucifix and six times with the sacred heart. San Martin de Porres is represented twice and Don Pedrito once. St. Cecilia, St. Isidro and St. John were represented once each. In addition one unknown Franciscan monk and another image in the robe of the Franciscans were found. Most images were three dimensional plaster cast statues, although paintings and tiled pictures were also popular, especially of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Most commonly statues were painted in natural colors. Gilding in gold paint was at times used on the images of St. Jude. It is notable that in only one capilla was there any sign of vandalism. Someone had scrawled a name on one wall. Although some of the larger statues were placed behind bars, most images were sitting openly on shelves. Coins and bills were also left uncovered and untended in the collection plates. Capillas command the respect of visitors.

TABLE V  
REPRESENTATION OF HOLY PERSONAGES

Image of Holy Personage	Capilla (Figure 28)										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	+
Jesus (child)	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Jesus (crucified)	-	1	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	4
Jesus (man)	3	1	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	6
Don Pedrito	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
St. Cecilia	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
St. Isidro the Farmer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
St. John the Baptist	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
St. Jude of Tadeo	10	2	-	3	-	5	1	-	-	-	21
St. Martin de Porres	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
Virgin of Guadalupe	4	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	1	-	9
Virgin San Juan de Los Lagos	5	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	7
Virgin Mary	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Franciscan Monk	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Unknown	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total	25	7	0	7	3	8	6	1	1	1	59

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The Mexicans have a special relationship with the saints, especially those with close ties to Mexico such as the Virgin of Guadalupe. These holy personages are friends as well as intermediaries. One young man at the Capilla de San Judas Tadeo was observed as he said his prayer then reverently made a round of the capilla touching each image of the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos as he went. It seemed as if he knew that the Virgin would have time for him.

The use of capillas is thus intimately tied to the belief that saints are intermediaries which may be called upon by the individual; a belief closely tied to indigenous religions. The patron saint of a village will provide protection for the individual citizens, becoming also a personal saint. Travellers may use capillas not only as religious sanctuaries, therefore, but as an opportunity to 'touch home'. Secular uses of capillas for bus stops or resting places are also common, illustrating the vernacular character of these landscape elements as well as the commonplace association between saint and man.

Images found within the capilla generally reflect that

of the patron saint of the village which erects and maintains the structure. Individual input is often found, however, as visitors leave offerings to their own favorites. Some images, such as San Martin de Porres and Don Pedrito, reflect regional influences. The saints represented are almost all Hispanic in character, reflecting close ties to the Mexican people, rather than of European origin. Even the number of images of Jesus and the Virgin Mary are surpassed by images of the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos and the Virgin of Guadalupe.

#### Death as Place

Attitudes toward death and dying, probably the most central issue in religion and intricately connected with the occurrence of both capillas and cruces, must be examined to explain these elements of the cultural landscape. First, does the Mexican attitude toward dying stipulate that journeys are completed at the will of the saints and thereby explain the use of capillas by travellers? Second, is the place of death of such significance that its location must be marked for some purpose beyond that of a memorial?

The Mexican attitude toward death has been termed a meshing of indifference and fear (Jaubert, 1985). The Mexican, according to Paz (1961, p. 58), "looks at it [death] face to face, with impatience, disdain or irony." This nonplussed concept of dying has been traced to the indigenous belief that dying was a continuance of life, or a



cyclical pattern. The Christian concept of the faithful going on to a better place would have reinforced this attitude of death as a positive force. It would seem contradictory in this case for travellers to spend time and money begging a safe journey if the result of death was so positive.

The other side of the Catholic coin must be emphasized here to explain this reluctance for betterment. If a person dies in sin, the results are not quite so positive. It would not be an advantage, therefore, to die on a journey far from home where confession and last rites may not be available. The Mexican custom of asking a safe journey should thereby perhaps not be assumed as a request to prevent death but only as a request to save it for a more opportune place. When the Mexican sings

If you are to kill me tomorrow  
 Why not kill me right away  
 - (Jaubert, 1985, p.197)

he shows his disdain for when he dies, not where.

When death does occur on a journey, the victim is thus placed in a vulnerable position, not because of the time of death but because of the geographic location. The most famous of Mexican tales, that of appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the peasant Juan Diego, illustrates the importance of geographic location and death. The conflict which arises is not due to the timing of his uncle's death, but to the geographic location of the death - he is too far from a priest to receive absolution. Place is an important

consideration not only as it relates to relative proximity to absolution, but as a religious element in indigenous culture. Place in indigenous cultures from the Navaho to the Aztec has played a more important role than time, time being but a circular, reinsuring pattern. The idea of place to the Indian, moreover, was an essential element to preservation during and after the Conquest (Whetten, 1948). It provided the linking element between the indigenous and the new beliefs as new shrines were erected over the ruins of the old, thus establishing a continuity rather than a total dissolution of belief.

The cruz then marks place. Place is a continuance, where time is not. If the place is only marked temporarily, it is of no concern. Many natives believe that there is nothing left of the personality of the soul after three years (Braden, 1966). As stated earlier, the interweaving of values which creates the need to mark the place of a fatality, like any other trait, cannot be explained empirically. Writers may form hypotheses to explain the existence of elements in the cultural landscape, but the custom as it exists now, like other customs of the Hispanic community, is an entity not even fully understood by those who practice it (Arreola, 1988).

#### Cultural Interpretation

Roadside shrines are an imprint of man on the landscape. According to Sopher (1967), a geographical study

of religious elements on the landscape may help interpret the ecological impact on a culture as well as the intensity of religious expression in an area. The distribution of building materials in this study did reflect an ecological impact on culture, mirroring the availability of natural resources in a region. It further illustrated the isolation of that part of the world where the desert and the mountain create enclaves of religious individualism touched in varying degrees by Roman Catholicism.

If one looks at the ratio of shrines to population, as suggested by Sopher, a strong rural bias becomes apparent. The interior regions with the least influence from either cities or the border show a marked increase in shrine sites. Intensity of religious expression may thus be interpreted as greater in rural areas than in areas with non-Hispanic influence.

Beyond location analysis, a study of the elements of the cultural landscape of religion reflects the history of a region and current trends of life and thought. The choice of images found in the capillas as well as the very existence of the shrines illustrates historical precedents. Husband (1985) found that the most common images in yard shrines in Tucson were St. Jude and The Virgin. Arreola (1988) discovered that the Virgin of San Juan de Los Lagos was the most popular image in San Antonio. Manzo (1983) concluded that Catholic yard shrines in Kansas City, Missouri and Archbald, Pennsylvania were primarily of the

Virgin Mary. Curtis (1980) identified Santa Barbara as the most popular image in Little Havana. Regional variation of patron saints may well be a marker of historical influence and cultural identity. Further study of shrines must be undertaken in other areas before the value of this marker can be determined.

Attempts have been made by both Mexican and American authors to interpret the Mexican psyche in terms of the individual's words and actions. Ramos (1962) tagged the Mexican as having an inferiority complex, pointing to character markers such as distrust, aggressiveness and hypersensitivity to insult. Paz (1961) explained the solitary character of the Mexican spirit in terms of a retrospective search for identity. There can be no argument that these authors provide valuable insights into the entity that we today identify as Mexican. A look at the religious landscape should not be forgotten, however, as a piece of the cultural puzzle which may provide insights in addition to or even beyond historical study or introspection.

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APPENDIX  
DESCRIPTION OF INDIVIDUAL CRUCES

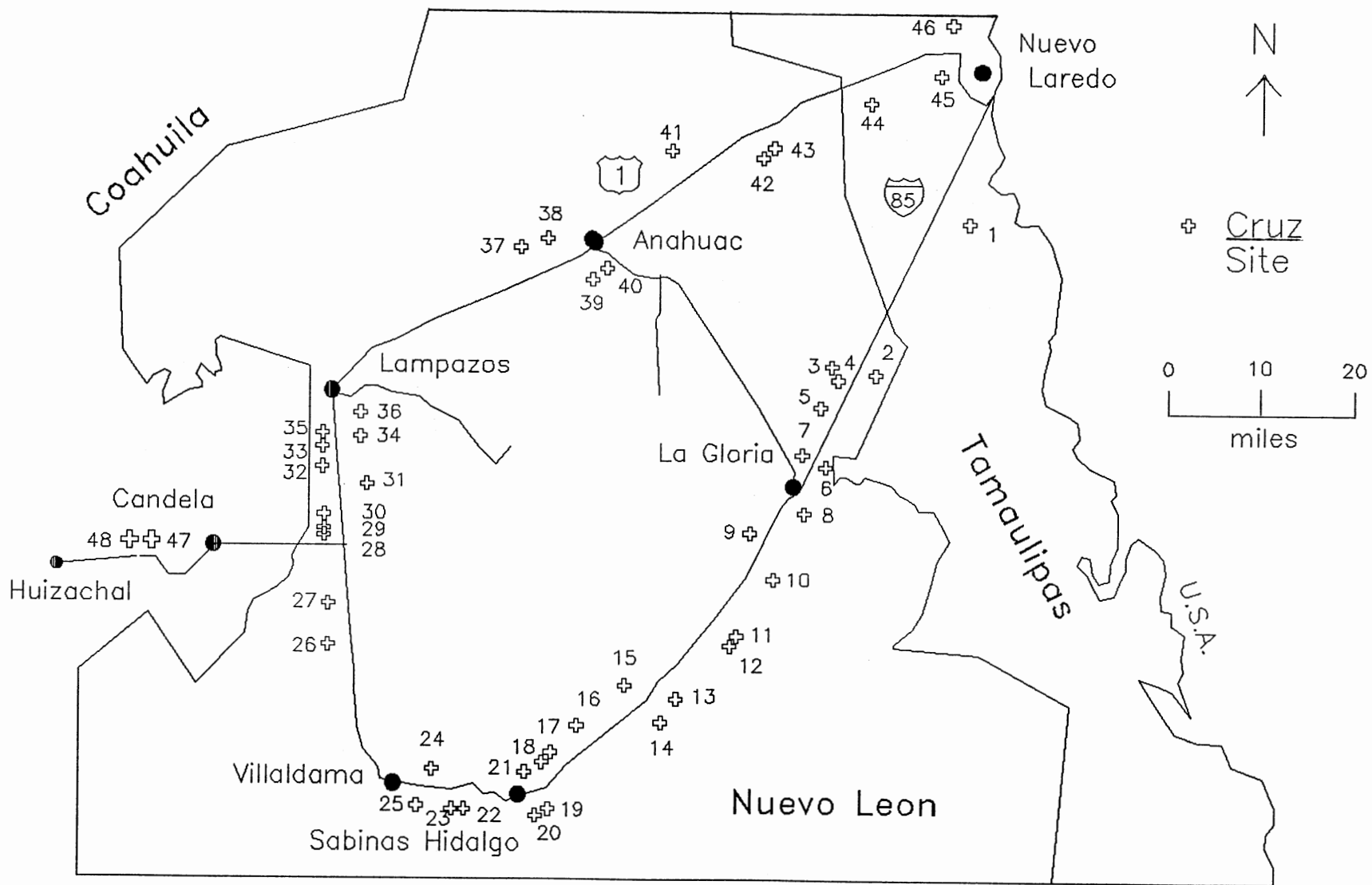


Figure 44. Cruces in Micro Area

<u>Cruz Site</u>	<u># at Site</u>	<u>Size*</u>	<u>Special Features</u>
1	1	M	wooden, square latticework pattern, attached to fence
2	1	M	green stone base, wrought iron cross with tips painted green, metal nameplate
3	1	L	stone statue placed atop large base with green, yellow and blue emblem shaped like a highway marker, two foot urns on either side, inscription
4	2	M	angle iron base supporting flat iron crosses, wood and straw crosses wrapped with foil attached to iron crosses, metal urns on either side
5	1	M	stone monument setting on slab, cross features circular plate in center with relief of face of Jesus crowned with
6	4	M	1 wooden cross which had fallen over, inscribed A.P.Z.; 1 cross of bound straw on a wrought iron frame with stone planter; 1 small wood on wood overlay cross with inscription -1945; 1 stone crucifix on stone base with inscription
7	1	M	stone slab with chimney-style niche placed toward back, topped with crucifix, red paint used to draw lines along front and side, site established between May and October 1990
8	2	L	stone crucifix atop stone base, inscribed M.V.; base with monument missing
9	1	M	stone cross on base with large urns on either side
10	2	M	2 wrought iron crosses welded onto a single iron bar support, 1 is painted blue with a white iron nameplate; 2 is smaller and white with a blue nameplate
11	1	M	4 foot square metal fence surrounds a metal cross with metal crucifix and nameplate
12	1	S	wood cross with inscription
13	1	M	metal fence surrounding wooden cross hung with rosary, God's Eye on fence

<u>Cruz Site</u>	<u># at Site</u>	<u>Size*</u>	<u>Special Features</u>
14	1	M	rusty pipe cross with metal nameplate
15	2	L,S	1 large stone cross on base with inscription placed immediately in front of small black wrought iron cross
16	1	L	small stone cross inscribed ' <u>Angel Blanco</u> ' placed before tablet with inscription, placed on top of crypt base
17	1	S	white stone cross, inscription, colorful ribbon wreath
18	1	M	white wooden cross
19	1	L	black wrought iron cross, plaque with yellow lettering
20	1	M	white stone cross on triangular shaped base containing inscription, stone urns on either side, large pink ribbon wreath attached to cross
21	1	L	stone pedestal with glassed niche containing wreath, stone ball placed over niche, topped with pipe cross painted white
22	1	S	tied straw cross covered with white tissue, wooden nameplate at bottom
23	1	M	flat iron symmetrical cross painted blue, nameplate
24	1	S	white wood cross
25	1	S	white wood cross
26	2	L	white wrought iron cross with rock piled at base, nameplate; identical to other cross about 35 feet away, the only identical <u>cruces</u> at separated sites
27	1	M	inscribed stone cross on base
28	3	M,S	white stone cross with crucifix atop a stone and copper base with inscription; directly behind is set a rusted wrought iron cross; directly behind is a small wooden cross - All three <u>cruces</u> have different dates
29	1	L	rectangular 2 X 2 X 2 1/2 stone base supports a 3 foot stone triangle with flattened top, no cross
30	1	L	plain metal pipe with metal nameplate, rusted tin can sets atop cross
31	1	M	white stone cross with inscription

<u>Cruz</u> Site	# at Site	Size*	Special Features
32	1	M	placed on pedestal, red wreath 2 foot white stone cross on crypt base
33	1	M	adorned stone cross, inscription, stone base
34	3	M	3 identical adorned stone crosses on stone bases all placed on concrete platform, all inscribed
35	1	M	white stone cross inscribed ' <u>nino</u> '
36	1	S	straw cross wrapped with green tissue embedded with flowers, stones piled at base
37	1	M	wrought iron, bent and rusty
38	1	L	2 1/2 X 5 foot concrete slab with a symmetrical iron cross embedded at one end, metal nameplate
39	3	L	4 X 4 white stucco building with red tiled roof, contents include a central stone cross on a pedestal with tall urns on either side, many flowers; a concrete slab by the highway is inscribed with name and date
40	2	L,S	small wood cross with piled stones; large ornate wrought iron cross with nameplate
41	1	S	iron cross on stone pedestal
42	1	S	wooden cross obscured by bouquets, urns of tin cans hold flowers on either side
43	3	L	central cross is 4 foot, embellished stone with inscription, set on breadbox-shaped base with inscription: <p style="text-align: center;">Tu Ausencia Une A Quienes Trataste En El Camino Del Culturo de la Mente y el Campo</p> Slightly smaller ornate stone <u>cruces</u> on either side with relief of face of Jesus with crown of thorns, bases shaped like breadboxes and inscribed with names and dates
44	2	S,M	small white wood with inscription, horizontal arm longer than vertical; black reinforcing rod with arrow points on cross,



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Cruz Site	# at Site	Size*	Special Features
45	1	S	nameplate flattened pyramid painted blue, niche carved from front
46	1	L	2 foot inscribed wood cross on stone base, set on large stone slab
47	1	L	large cross shaped from two rectangular boxes of ornate wrought iron, crucifix in center, stone base topped with colorful tile image of the Virgin of Guadalupe
48	1	S	iron cross driven into rock, bent and rusty, nameplate

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\*S=Small  
M=Medium  
L=Large

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