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Social Patterns in Pre-Classic Mesoamerica

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Social Dimensions of Pre-Classic Burials

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Burials are the material residue of specific practices carried out in the past. These highly structured data are our evidence for variation in mortuary ritual, reflecting not only characteristics of the individual interred but also significant dimensions of social relations in past communities. For Pre-Classic Mesoamerica, specific mortuary practices have been shown to vary with other indications of differential social power, or rank (e.g., Tolstoy 1989; Grove and Gillespie 1992; Merry de Morales 1987). Analysis of the social relations evident in mortuary practices is one avenue to begin to understand how social differences were created and endowed with social value through distinctive practices in Pre-Classic societies.

Drawing on selected samples of burials from different regions of Mesoamerica spanning the Early to Middle Pre-Classic, I will pursue two basic questions. First, what kinds of practices are represented, and what are their implications for the scale and nature of social relations shaped through mortuary ritual? Second, how did some practices come to distinguish certain individuals and abstract them from the small-scale social context of the residential group? In addressing these questions, I draw attention to the way mortuary practices in different settings within communities contributed to creating residential and communitywide scales of identity and difference. I single out the inclusion of costume and pottery serving vessels in burials as reflecting individual differentiation on the one hand and group participation in mortuary rituals on the other. Finally, I argue that shifts in scale, accompanied by some standardization of other mortuary practices, are evidence of the emergence of individuals claiming and being credited with wider authority and positions of community importance, a key feature of the Pre-Classic development of social complexity.

I use the term “residential group” throughout to label the people who re-

sided together in the groups of buildings arranged around or adjacent to exterior workspace, the residential compounds that characterize Pre-Classic Mesoamerican sites. While I assume that core members were related through kinship links, I do not assume any particular kind of kinship system, nor that all members of the residential group were kin. My model for social relations in residential groups is the “house societies” defined by Claude Levi-Strauss (1983), further discussed by James Boone (1990: 213–218) and ethnographically illustrated by Susan McKinnon (1991), among others. While the concept has perhaps best been illustrated by ethnographers working in Indonesia and, although not explicitly so labeled, in Oceania (e.g., Weiner 1976; Munn 1986), Levi-Strauss’ original formulation was based on societies of the northwest United States and other native American groups and was also applied to African, Japanese, and medieval European societies.

The “house” was defined as “a corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both” (Levi-Strauss 1983: 174). Boone (1990: 215) argues that “houses are ranked both internally and externally by birth order, by anisogamy, and by other indices of differential transmissions of estates, heirlooms, titles, prerogatives, and renown.” Hierarchy in house societies is contested, constantly under negotiation through alliances and exchanges, negotiations in which individual status and house status may part ways (McKinnon 1991: 259–276).

For my purposes, key factors in this model are that the “house,” a cooperative coresidential economic unit with internal ranking and some centralized decision-making authority, seeks through alliances to improve its situation vis-à-vis other houses, while at the same time members of the house (Clark and Blake’s [1994] “aggrandizers”) seek to improve their individual standing with whatever resources are available (see Joyce 1996). In using house societies as my model, I am assuming that Pre-Classic Mesoamerica initially had little centralized authority above the level of some such small-scale social group; that the interests of individuals were sometimes advanced with those of their group and sometimes held back by within-group obligations; and that in the negotiations between houses, both house and individual identities were defined.

MORTUARY PRACTICE: ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATIONS

Ethnographic accounts of mortuary rituals usually present deaths as disruptions in existing social relations, and burials as the occasion of efforts designed

to heal the breach of society (Bloch and Parry 1982; Hertz 1960; van Gennep 1960). Such attitudes are not universal. An analysis of variation in burial practices between groups of hunter-gatherers (Woodburn 1982) suggests that the perception of danger and the expenditure of effort on burial elaboration are related to the degree to which delayed obligations between people are significant within a specific society. In other words, where members of society count on individuals for future benefits, death represents a loss of predictable cooperation that increases the emotional experience of loss (Kan 1989: 165–177).

This argument should not simply be reduced to a kind of utilitarianism. The elaboration of mortuary ritual in these instances is a special case of the more general reality, described by Nancy Munn (1986), that at death social relations constructed through an individual are dissolved and must be reformed without the person's living presence. Mortuary rites are the highly charged occasion on which the web linking one individual to others, through birth, marriage, and clientage, is displayed and the rent social fabric rewoven, now linked through the dead (compare Weiner 1976: 85–90). The surviving members of society array themselves in relation to the dead and by so doing strengthen bonds to each other (Kan 1989: 125–164).

In some ways the construction of social links through the dead is more permanent than links transacted with the living, whose status and interests change continually throughout life. Mortuary rituals may symbolically mark the dichotomy between fleeting and permanent aspects of society (Bloch 1981, 1982). While symbols adopted are specific to their context, the permanence and scale of burial facilities are commonly counterposed to the decay of all or part of the body as representative of social relations transcending the individual lifespan (Bloch and Parry 1982: 27–38). As Thomas Dillehay (1992: 403–405) has shown for the Mapuche of Chile, burial facilities come to stand for more inclusive social identities as they *lose* their specific association with the individual interred within them. In a general sense, the dead are transformed through mortuary ritual from unique persons to members of social collectivities, such as ancestors, of interest to the living (Bloch 1982; Watson 1982). No longer actively seeking their own advantage, the dead can become a powerful moral force guaranteeing claims of solidarity by the living.

PRE-CLASSIC BURIAL PRACTICES

Mesoamerican burial practices during the Pre-Classic period, even from widely separated communities, share a number of common features. Burials may include figurines, pottery vessels, and less common ceramic artifacts (stamps, rattles, whistles, and masks, among others). The deceased may wear costume

ornaments, such as necklaces, bracelets, anklets, and ear ornaments, made of a wide variety of materials but commonly including shell, greenstone, and polished iron ore. Stone tools, especially obsidian blades and polished celts, are often included, and other more perishable tools, such as bone awls and punches, are sometimes detected. Finally, while Pre-Classic burials are commonly located in and around residences, specialized burial sites away from any residence may also be employed. The diversity in the precise practices evident at different sites is sufficient to indicate clearly that similarities are the result of varied expressions of shared cultural heritage within similar social contexts, not of the imposition of centralized ritual.

Pre-Classic burials from Honduras are illustrative of all these features.¹ They were placed within residential compounds, in caves removed from sites, and within nonresidential monumental construction within sites. I have argued that variation in burial location in Pre-Classic Honduras created differences in the visibility of mortuary ritual, and quite likely the scale of participation in ceremonies conducted for specific burials (Joyce 1996, n.d.b). Placement within the residential compound is more private, and participation in mortuary rituals for these individuals could have been restricted, perhaps to members of the residential group of the deceased and others with close social links. In contrast, both cave and mound burial are divorced from the residential compound. Burial in monumental architecture created marked sites that cannot be ignored today, and would have dominated the space of the site and the lives of its inhabitants in myriad ways in the past (compare Love n.d., this volume). The location of burials and consequently of some of the attendant mortuary rituals was thus part of the creation of public spaces transcending the defined boundaries of the household, and presumably of the creation of communities of participants in the activities that took place in these spaces.

Among the contents of Honduran burials were costume ornaments of shell, greenstone, and other polished stone, as well as pottery. Individual beads are of forms common in southeastern Mesoamerica:² flat discs, cylinders, animal teeth

¹ The burials I discuss came from the sites of Copan, Los Naranjos, Playa de Los Muertos, and the Cuyamel caves. My discussion is based on published reports (Baudez and Becquelin 1973: 17–50, 91–93; Fash 1985; Gordon 1898; Healy 1974; Popenoe 1934; Rue, Freter, and Ballinger 1989; Viel and Cheek 1983) and my own examination of the material from caves of Copan and Playa de los Muertos in the collections of Harvard University's Peabody Museum (Joyce 1996, n.d.b).

² This observation is based on a comparison between the large body of well-dated ornaments from Chalchuapa, El Salvador (Sheets 1978) and ornaments from Honduran burials (cited above) and other Pre-Classic contexts at Los Naranjos (Baudez and Becquelin 1973) and Playa de los Muertos (Peabody Museum collections; Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938).

or claws, skulls, and “duckbills.” The number of options for unique bodily adornment using these ornaments was very high, even without consideration of the probable use of perishable materials—feathers, barkcloth, and cotton textiles—and the evident use of painted body (or cloth) markings suggested by ceramic stamps and cylinder seals. The creation of unique appearance is abundantly documented in Pre-Classic Honduran figurines and in the individuality of costumes worn by buried individuals. In 16 burials from Playa de los Muertos, containing 10 strings of beads, no two costumes were alike. Simple “napkin ring” earspools, executed in polished black and brown ceramic and fine greenstone, were the only standardized ornament. Ear ornaments were worn only by adults. Wrist, neck, and waist ornaments vary in numbers and arrangement of beads. Shell was employed in children’s costume and greenstone in both adult and juvenile ornaments. The common use of certain materials and forms suggests that shared conceptions of beautiful materials were maintained. While some aspects of categorical social difference (age) are reflected in the nature of body ornaments, costumes themselves were individualized.

I suggest that costume, intimately tied to the body, openly displayed, and subject to social assessment, should be viewed as a medium for the creation of individuality. Munn (1986: 96–97, 101–102) labels as “beautification” the social marking of the body as desirable and the person as “persuasive” to others achieved by the use of skillfully worked body ornaments that set one person off from others. She and other ethnographers (e.g., Howard 1991: 62; Kensinger 1991: 43, 47–48) stress that personal adornment, enhancing individual appearance, supports competition for the positive evaluation of others and the personal influence that grows from such evaluation in face-to-face interaction within small-scale societies. By burying the deceased in costume, Pre-Classic Mesoamerican people perpetuated beautification and its enhancement of individual distinction even at the end of life. If costume was a medium for the creation of individuality, its use in burial may be an index of the necessary breakup of personal identity that Munn argues takes place through mortuary ritual. As she notes, “death itself initiates only a *physical* dissolution of the body . . . death dissolves neither the intersubjective amalgam that constitutes the *bodily person* and forms the ground of each self, nor the intersubjective connections between others built on and condensed within the deceased’s person” (Munn 1986: 164; original emphasis).

Residential compound mortuary practices at Playa de los Muertos combine the marking of individual identity through adornment with signs of social relations in the form of ceramic vessels. Burials with costume usually also included pots. Because the vessels included are forms used for food serving, they

constitute metonymic or indexical signs³ for commensality, in essence the enactment of a community. Arnold van Gennep (1960: 164–165) noted that meals on the occasion of funerals “reunite all the surviving members of the group with each other, and sometimes also with the deceased” (see also Munn 1986: 172–178; Kan 1989: 35–38). Pre-Classic mortuary rituals might have actually involved meals uniting the people whose links together were endangered by the death. Whether or not the face-to-face groups that shared food enacted their participation as part of mortuary rites, the practice of including serving vessels in burials independently invokes their social setting, meals. Unlike costume, pots in burials at Playa de los Muertos present more regularities, as their status as marked media of social relations extending beyond the individual would suggest. Bottles and open bowls or cylinders were most common, and no burial with pottery lacked one of these forms.

Seven of 23 vessels are lobed or squash-effigy bottles, each executed slightly differently. Freestanding objects can be a focus for communal value created through beautification (Munn 1986: 20). Adornment of objects makes them subjects of comment and comparative evaluation, creating reputations for the objects, their makers, and their users. The recognition of shared standards for adornment and execution of pottery, and the measurement of each attempt at beautification against those standards, ethnographically demarcate those within a group from those outside it (Hardin 1983). Selection of serving vessel forms for elaboration has been identified as an aspect of aggrandizing behavior in the earliest ceramic complexes of Pre-Classic Mesoamerica (Clark and Blake 1994: 23–28), implying both the existence of shared standards and differential evaluation of execution in this permanent, public medium.

I suggest that costume on the one hand and pottery vessels on the other were employed in mortuary ritual in Pre-Classic Honduras to signal the dissolution of individual personal identity and the breakup and reconstitution of the social relations of which the deceased had been part. Survivors with vested interests in the reconstruction of social networks previously focused on the dead person carried out the mortuary rituals that result in the burials we re-

³ Index and metonymy are special kinds of symbolic relations in which an item invokes a chain of associations. These kinds of signs have also been described as “contiguity tropes” (Friedrich 1991: 34), a class of rhetorical figures that are characterized by such relations. Because contiguity tropes are essentially strings of associations, they are open to analysis in ways that more arbitrary symbols are not (Herzfeld 1992: 83–84). At least one of the entailments of serving vessels, an association that would always have been within the awareness of a viewer, was meals. To the extent that meals united certain groups of people (and not others), meals, and the vessels that were used in them, entailed an association with people with whom a viewer had certain kinds of relationships.

cover archaeologically. The degree to which burials were elaborated would depend on the importance to these survivors of the reinscription of their severed connections, and reflect the social strategies of the house and aggrandizers within it.

At Playa de los Muertos, the burials with the largest number and greatest diversity of items were those of juveniles. Such elaboration of select juvenile burials, seen not only in Honduras but throughout Pre-Classic Mesoamerica (e.g., Drennan 1976: 247–256; Grove and Gillespie 1992: 199; Tolstoy 1989: 115; Robin and Hammond 1991: 224; Hammond, this volume), may reflect the position of these individuals at the intersection of social networks especially valued and particularly endangered, by the death so memorialized. Ethnographically, connections between groups created by marriage are strengthened through the birth and growth of children, with regular reinforcement of obligations and rights in ceremonies marking life stages. The death of a juvenile or infant truncates this developmental process and can endanger links not yet securely fixed. Mortuary ritual could take on the burden that would have been borne by other ceremonies in the life of the person had they survived. Through their involvement in mortuary ritual, groups of survivors displayed their regard for the deceased and attempted to ensure continued positive connections with others through that person.

VARIATION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Since mortuary rituals are designed and carried out by social groups, their patterned remains in burials can also be examined as evidence of the habitual practices that simultaneously create commonality and distinction between social groups within a community. I apply this approach to a recently published catalogue of more than two hundred burials from Pre-Classic Tlatilco in Central Mexico which includes site plans demonstrating their spatial clustering (García Moll et al. 1991). A preliminary cluster analysis of these burials identified a tendency for adult female burials to contain more pottery and for nonpottery items to be found in adult male or juvenile burials (Serra and Sugiura 1987). Paul Tolstoy (1989) included information on some of these burials, from what is labeled Temporada IV, in an analysis based on complete information for the equally large Temporada II population from earlier work at the site.

Tolstoy concluded that the Temporada IV burials largely were later than those of Temporada II, and defined indicators of social hierarchy in the burial population as a whole. Iron ore mirrors, necklaces, greenstone, and shell objects were all limited to burials constituting the top rank of this status hierarchy (Tolstoy 1989: 109–112). These items, most of them elements of costume, were

also among characteristics distinguishing a statistical cluster of Temporada IV burials, with unspecified spatial associations (Serra and Sugiura 1987). Individuals of mixed age and sex were identified as similar due to shared use of iron ore mirrors, jade belts, jade ear ornaments, and “rock crystal” beads, along with certain elaborate ceramic vessels. Also working from the Temporada IV catalogue, Cameron Wesson (n.d.) found that burials of Tolstoy’s top rank exhibited distinctive cranial deformation and little evidence of bone pathologies that would have resulted from greater labor demands and poorer nutrition.

Each of these studies suggests that there were real distinctions between individuals at Tlatilco reflected in their general health, appearance (in the form of both physical modification and use of ornaments), and the elaboration of their burials. Tolstoy (1989) found consistent rankings reflected in the quality and quantity of objects included, the depth and preparation of the grave, and the position of the body. Nonetheless, he concluded that not all of the variability in the burial population could be explained simply as due to the reflection of individual rank. “The nature of these objects and their diverse patterns of occurrence suggest that the denotation of rank was not their exclusive function. . . . Though consistent in the ranking they suggest for individual graves, these indicators do not exhibit uniformly strong associations with one another. This suggests that other important and, in part, hidden factors contribute to their distributions” (Tolstoy 1989: 109–112). I explored the possibility that differences, not between the status of buried individuals, but in practices between residential groups engaged in competitive social relations, might be one of these hidden factors, accounting for other variation in the nature of items included in burials.⁴

⁴ I created variables for each distinguishable category of object in the Temporada IV catalogue and employed the graphical approaches of exploratory data analysis to evaluate variation on the basis of age or sex. Very few tendencies by age or sex, all mentioned in the text, were discovered. The strength of correlations was tested using the chi square statistic when the expected values in cells of the contingency table allowed, and I identify such instances as “significant” in the text. Cases where expected cell size was too small to allow use of the chi square test, but the actual value of a cell in the contingency table diverged from the expected value by a sufficiently high factor (occurrence twice that expected), are noted in the text as “higher than expected” incidence of a particular association. They represent possible tendencies in the population.

I also systematically evaluated correlations of all pairwise combinations of category variables. Through this process, I was able to identify one set of variables—obsidian, bone punches, and some groundstone, discussed below—with significant levels of association. A weaker association was detected between the incidence of bottles and open vessel forms. The open vessel category is very heterogeneous, and the association of bottles with vases is stronger than that with open vessels as a whole.

As Tolstoy's comments suggest, I found no evidence of strong associations among the entire suite of objects included in burials. Instead, the burial assemblages may better be viewed as composed of components included independently of one another. The presence of any one of these components (e.g., figurines) does not provide clear grounds to expect other components. A hierarchical structure of choice may, however, be discernible. Burials with the rarest components usually also include more common components. Pottery vessels are most common and in many burials are the only objects included. Each component can be viewed as an option added to an initial common content, up to the rarest items: costume worn by the deceased. Viewed as a structure of choice, the composition of Tlatilco burials most directly reflects the practices differently employed by survivors belonging to different residential groups.

The burials excavated in Temporada IV fall into well-defined spatial groups. Within groups, orientations tend to be shared, and in each group two major orientations are found. Tolstoy (1989) argued that burial orientation indicates the presence at the site of two moieties, with both inmarried and native residents placed in what are likely residential compound burial locations.⁵ As Tolstoy noted, within each spatial cluster, rich burials tend to share a single orientation, perhaps that of the locally born members of the residential group. In some clusters, there are groups of male, female, and juvenile burials that may suggest the use of distinctive burial sites based on age or sex in some compounds (Fig. 1). As seen elsewhere in Pre-Classic Mesoamerica, and as Tolstoy noted, juveniles on the whole have the richest burials.

Among the components of Tlatilco burials with apparently independent patterns of occurrence in individual burials were the use of red pigment, presence of pottery vessels, inclusion of pottery figurines, incorporation of musical instruments and other rare artifacts, the presence of stone and bone tools and debitage, and the use of costume ornaments. Several of these characteristics are

⁵ The presence of features such as bottle-shaped pits in the published profiles from the site support the interpretation of these clusters as subresidential compound burials. Although the clusters define small spaces, they in fact are as large as, or larger than, the houses documented for contemporary Coapexco (Tolstoy 1989: 90–91). The Temporada IV clusters could represent as many as 25 of the largest structures, or at least 15 courtyard groups, of the size represented at Coapexco. The number of burials—a mean of 6.8 in areas approximating structures and 12.8 in areas approximating courtyards—cannot represent an entire population accumulating over a long period of time. Some individuals may have been disposed of elsewhere, and others may have been disturbed and relocated to allow later burials. The presence of secondary burial treatment was noted by the excavators and includes the consolidation of skulls in pits. The interments that are the focus of this analysis thus represent a particular moment in a dynamic sequence of burial and reburial and the treatment accorded only selected persons.

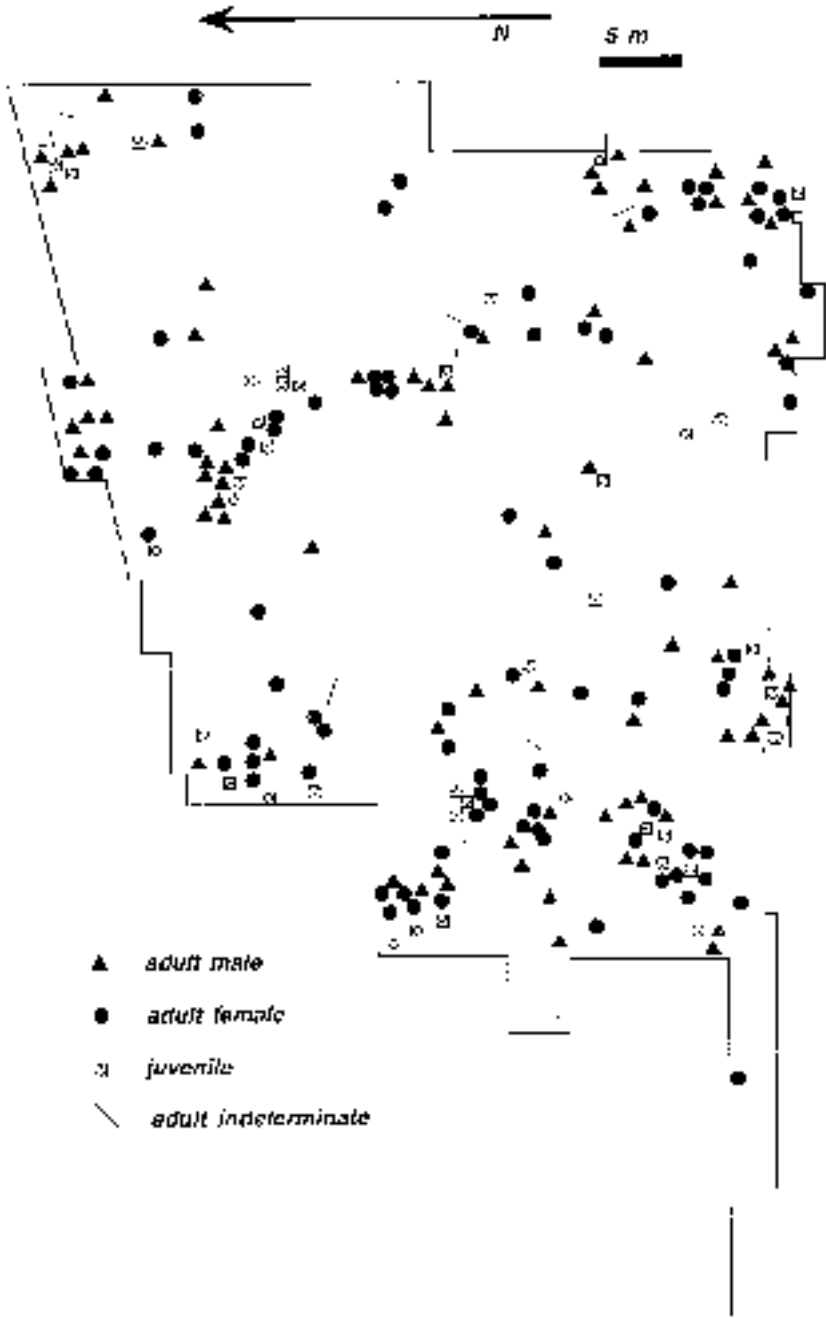


Fig. 1 Adult male, adult female, and unsexed juvenile burials at Tlatilco.

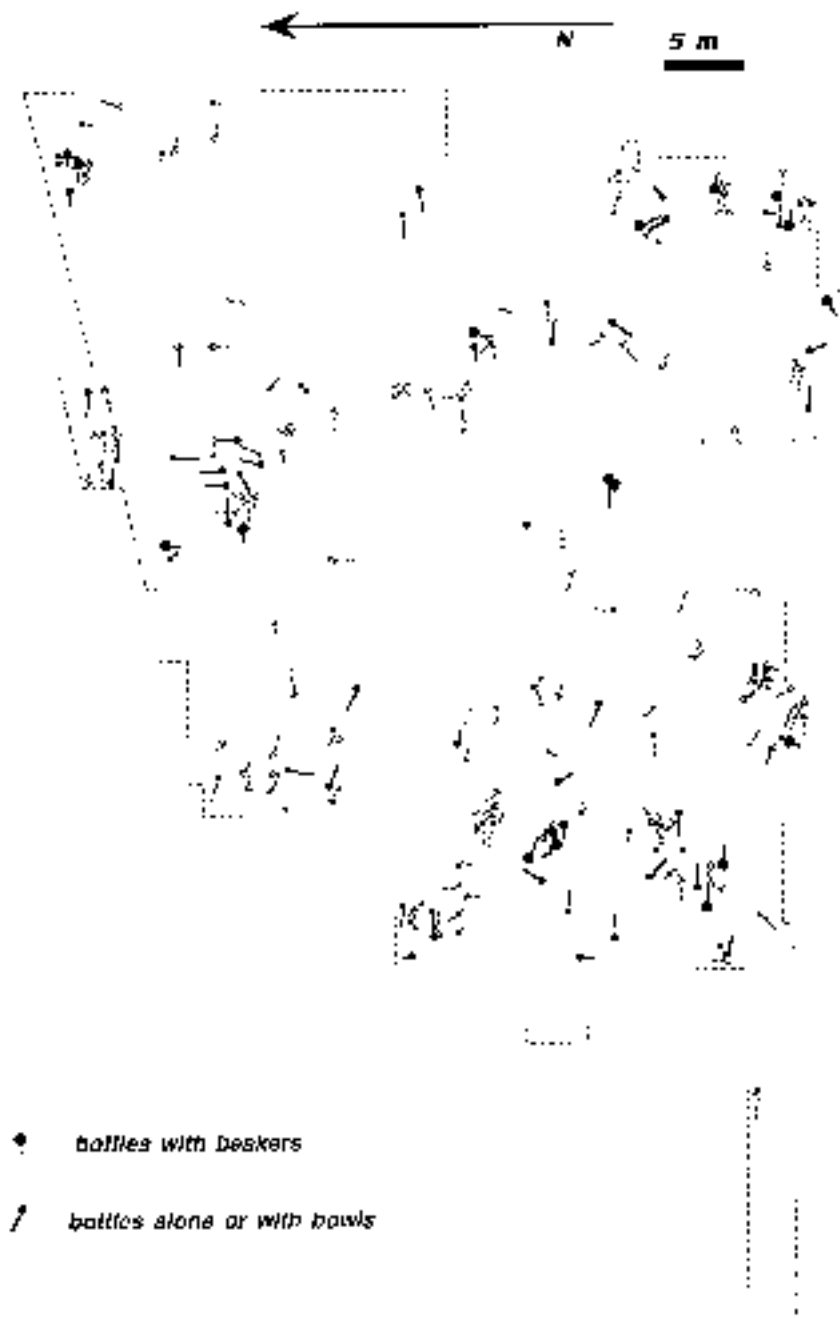


Fig. 2 Bottles and bowls in graves at Tlatilco. The orientation of each burial is indicated by the enlarged end of the symbol. Burials without bottles or bowls are light gray.

common within the community represented by the Temporada IV burials, while others are spatially restricted and may reflect practices distinctive of specific residential groups.

The most uniform distribution of artifacts across clusters is that of pottery vessels. While a large number of burials lack pots, no well-defined cluster is without some burials containing them. A closer examination of distributions of different forms of vessels reveals some distinctions between clusters that reflect practices differentiating groups within the communitywide pattern of use of pottery serving vessels.⁶ Bottles are less generally represented than pottery as a whole, and burials with bottles tend to occur repeatedly in specific clusters (Fig. 2). Within some clusters, bottles were an element in most burials. The presence of tall vases, all of which were found in burials also containing bottles, is another example of apparent diversity in the practices resulting in the incorporation of pottery in burials, with certain clusters repeatedly including bottles and tall vases, and other clusters avoiding the practice entirely, even if they use bottles. Although there are fewer burials with pottery figurines, they also seem to be used widely within the community excavated in Temporada IV. Burials with exceptional numbers of figurines are generally unique in their cluster, but the inclusion of from two to five figurines is a feature repeated in multiple burials in two clusters (Fig. 3).

The inclusion of pottery vessels and figurines in burials is a widespread practice within the community, and these objects are among the most common kinds of burial embellishments. Residential compound-specific patterns are more evident when rarer practices are examined. For example, the use of red pigment in burials is associated with all four of the ranks defined by Tolstoy. It is uncommon, restricted to 32 (out of 213) burials excavated in Temporada IV. Red pigment is slightly more common in female burials than would be expected and is significantly more likely to be used in the burials of young adults (15–30 years of age). The strongest association of red pigment, however, is as a practice typical of certain clusters (Fig. 4). Multiple burials in eight clusters, all concentrated in the southeast edge of the excavated area, employ red pigment. One other cluster used red pigment on half of the burials. Otherwise, red pigment is employed in no more than two burials in any cluster, and is absent from many clusters altogether.

⁶ Ideally, I would have evaluated the specific decoration of vessels. Inconsistent illustration of vessels and poor resolution of photographs in the catalogue precluded this.

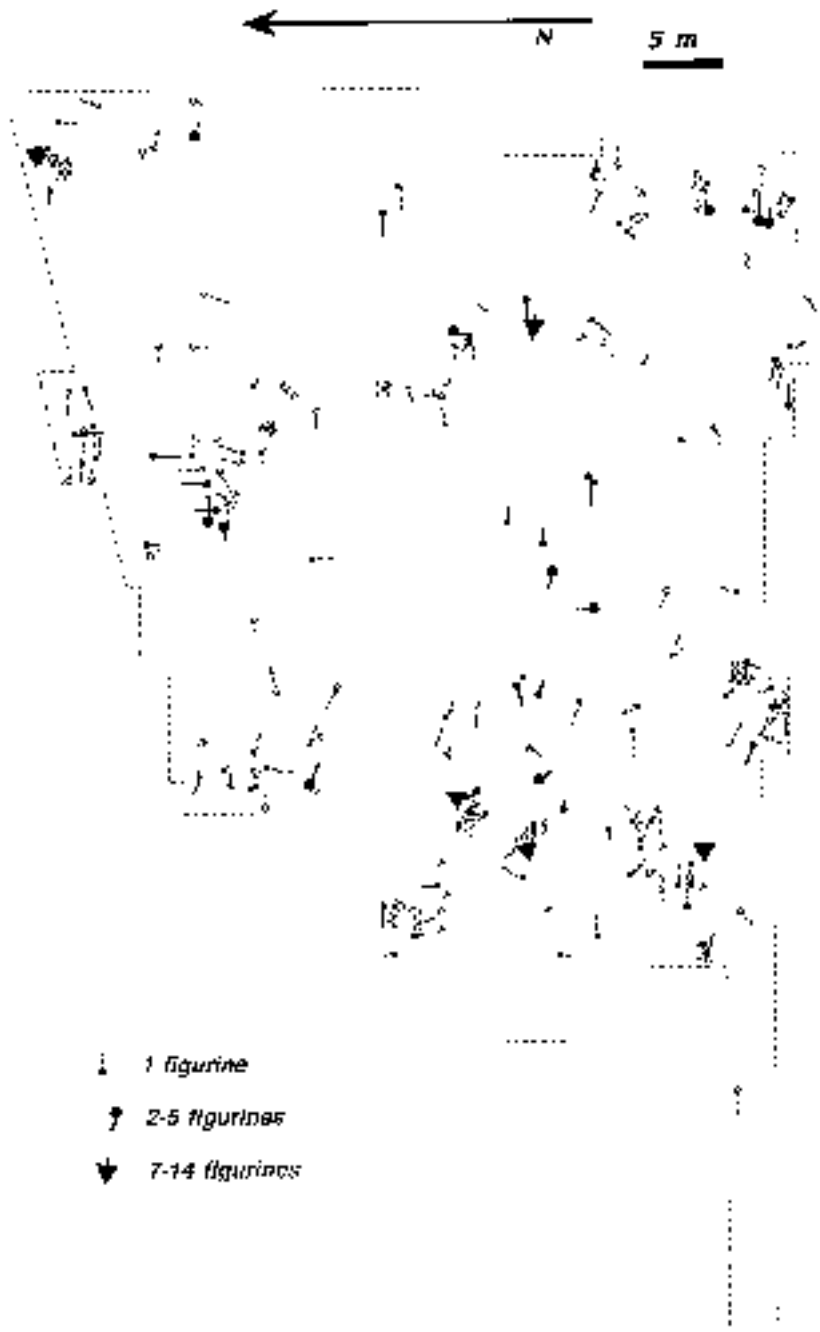


Fig. 3 Figurines in graves at Tlatilco. The orientation of each burial is indicated by the enlarged end of the symbol. Burials without figurines are light gray.

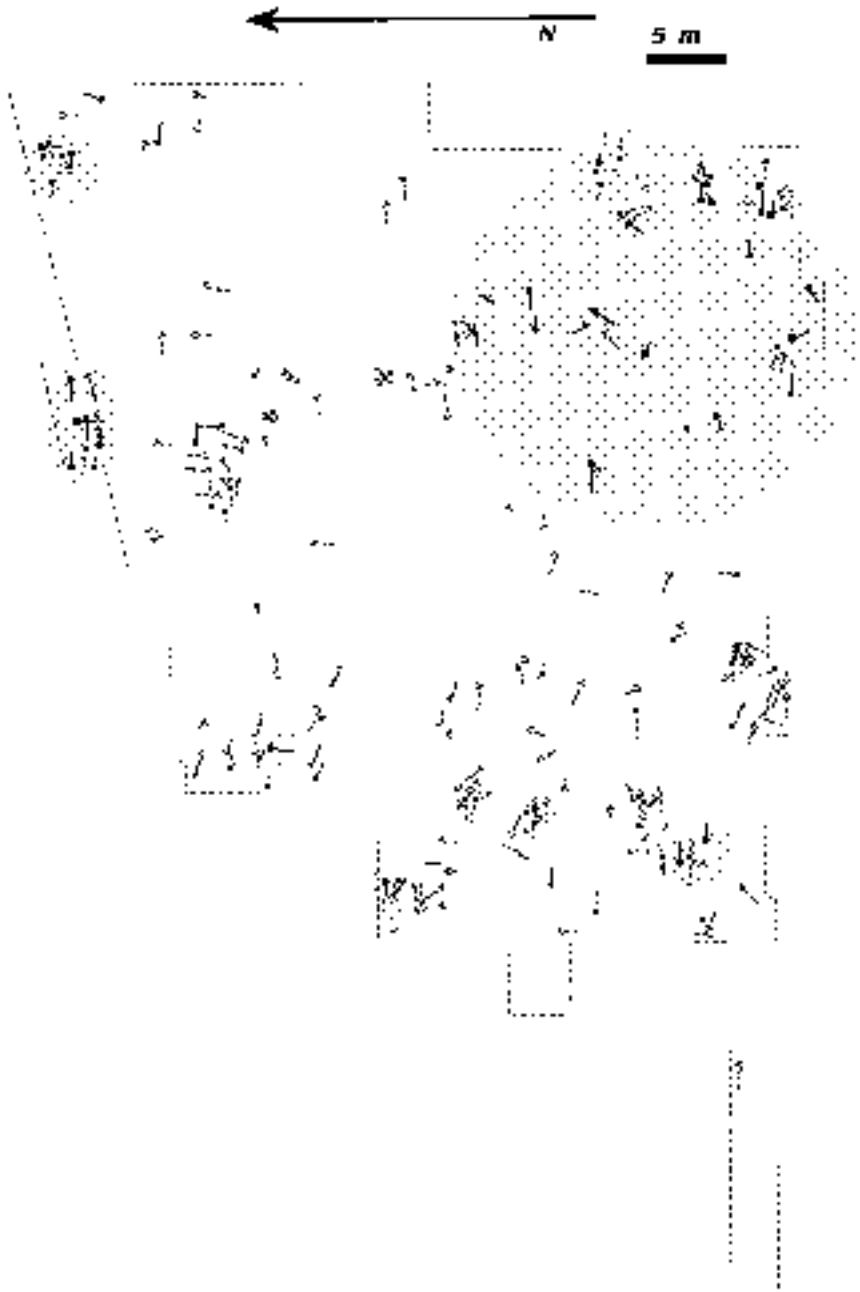


Fig. 4 Red pigment in graves at Tlatilco. The orientation of each burial is indicated by the enlarged end of the symbol.

Social Dimensions of Pre-Classic Burials

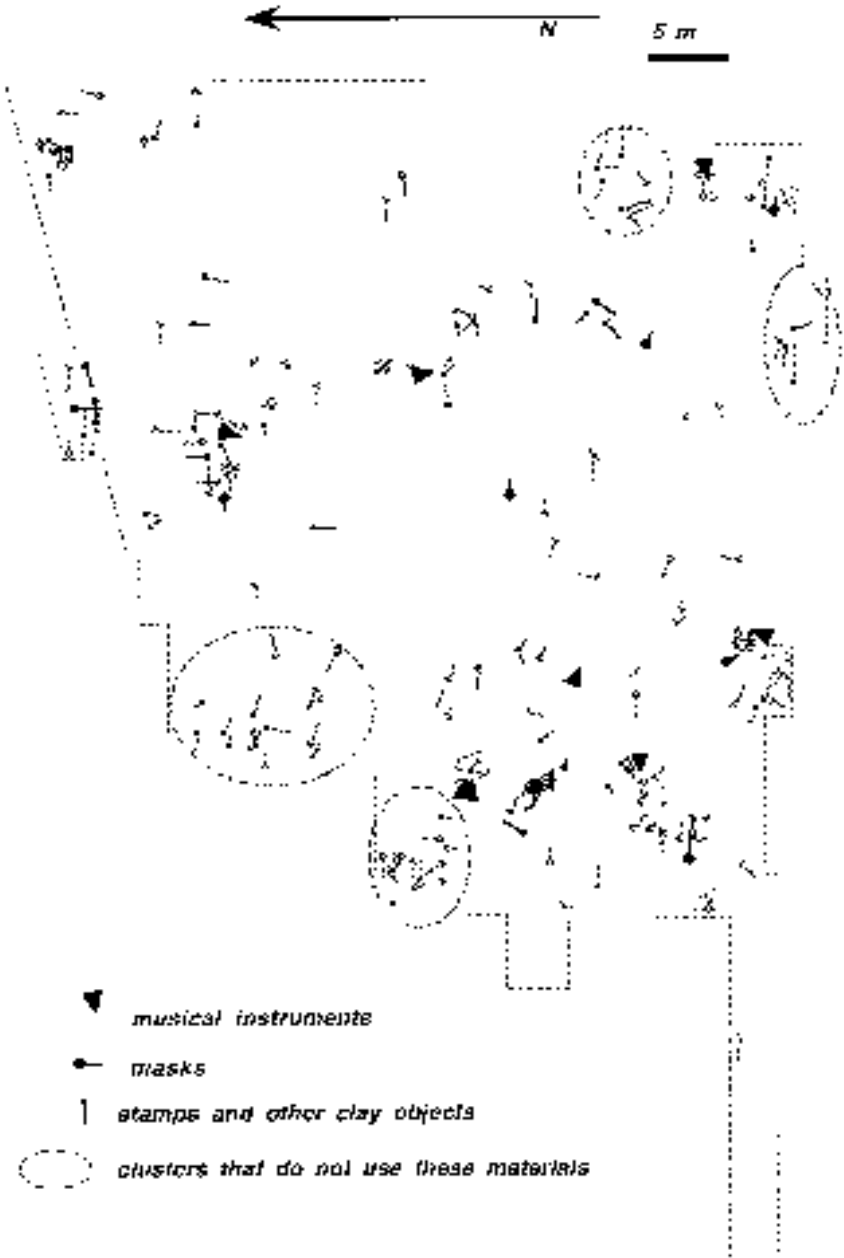


Fig. 5 Musical instruments, masks, stamps, and tokens in graves at Tlatilco. The orientation of each burial is indicated by the enlarged end of the symbol. Burials without musical instruments, stamps, masks, or tokens are light gray.

The inclusion of rare artifacts, clay masks, stamps and tokens,⁷ and musical instruments (clay rattles and whistles and shell trumpets) also demonstrates cluster-level patterning. Stamps and miscellaneous tokens are more common than expected in male burials, while musical instruments are more common than expected in female burials. Several clusters of burials lack any of these rare artifacts, even when they are in close proximity to clusters that include them in multiple burials (Fig. 5). Musical instruments are common in clusters in the southwest part of the site; outside this area, they occur at most in a single burial in any cluster.

The distributions of most of the features of burials are independent of each other. The mortuary rituals that resulted in these distributions combined different kinds of actions drawn from a suite of practices common to the community as a whole. The use of pottery vessels in mortuary rites throughout the community may reflect the importance of meals in small-scale social relations between and within groups and the significance of pots as media for symbolism. Differentiation between groups is most obvious in the choice to employ more variable elements of burial preparation, such as red pigment. The inclusion of unusual artifacts, such as musical instruments, in burials introduces the possibility that the use of some or all of these objects also distinguished the residents of the cluster during life.

While the functions of musical instruments, stamps, masks, and tokens are not entirely clear, it is possible that some of them were employed in specialized performances. Flannery (1976) has argued for the interpretation of musical instruments and certain costume elements as evidence of ritual performance in Pre-Classic Oaxaca. If some or all of the rare objects from Tlatilco were employed in the performance of ceremony, the differences between groups in their use might be related to distinctive ritual practice. Clearer implications for action during life can be derived from the various tools included in burials. Among these tools are a wide array of bone and antler punches, needles, and picks, grinding stones, and obsidian debitage.⁸

⁷ I use the neutral term "token" here to label miscellaneous pottery objects, including small balls, flat rectangular or oval plaques, and other irregular forms. These were described in the catalogue as "fichas" and "objetos." Because, like stamps, tokens are more likely to occur in male burials, I grouped stamps and tokens together in Figure 5.

⁸ I reviewed the illustration of each individual object with a common catalogue description, for example, bone or antler "punzon," and regrouped them based on unrecognized formal distinctions. "Punzones" included both tools that were broad relative to their length and others that were long and narrow. A small number had notched ends, and some of the long narrow tools appear to have eyes (needles with eyes were recorded for Temporada II). The long narrow tools and notched end tools are indistinguishable from archaeological

Grinding stone sets (a handstone and platform; see note 8) may have been used in a variety of ways, and the association of two with raw pigment suggests that mineral processing was one task employing these tools. Bone needles and picks are forms appropriate for use in textile or basketry production (for other Pre-Classic instances of evidence for these crafts, see Hendon, this volume, and Marcus 1989: 184). Few burials have either sets of grinding stones or possible weaving picks (Fig. 6). Thus it is striking that burials with grinding stone sets tend to be found in the clusters of the northeast quadrant of the site (including one cluster with 2 examples), while those with bone weaving picks and needles are common in the clusters of the southwest.

In contrast with these less common tools, bone or antler punches that are appropriate for use in lithic production (either to produce blades from prepared cores or for retouch) were present in 25 burials. In 20 of these, obsidian was also included, accounting for 42 percent of the burials with obsidian in the site (where obsidian was present in only 22 percent of the burials). With a single exception (one of a pair of burials isolated away from any cluster), burials with bone punches and obsidian were repeated features of clusters that, in turn, formed three neighborhoods within the site. Sixteen more burials with obsidian, but lacking bone or antler tools, were located in the same three neighborhoods. The clusters in these areas, containing 48 percent of the burials in the site, accounted for 75 percent of the burials with obsidian (Fig. 7).

These clusters also yielded 14 of 17 burials containing single handstones. Four handstones were in burials that had both bone or antler punches and obsidian.⁹ A

tools identified by comparison with ethnographic sources as weaving picks and needles and were recoded as picks. Similarly, I coded as a set grinding platforms and handstones (described in the catalogue as pestles, manos, metates, mortars, and so on) found together in single burials. I recoded the remaining ground stone artifacts, all handstones (manos, pestles, or hammerstones), separately. Due to the nature of the catalogue, it is not possible to define more precisely what characteristics defined the original variables “mano,” “pestle,” or “hammerstone.” What is clear is that each of these terms was applied to a ground stone item that is of a size to be held in the hand.

⁹ A linear regression analysis demonstrated a relatively strong positive association between obsidian and punches ($R^2 = 44.5$). This relationship is strengthened by considering the presence of ground stone ($R^2 = 72.9$), although this is at least in part due to a negative relationship between paired grinding stones and obsidian/punches (that is, the presence of the paired grinding stones generally indicates a high probability of absence of obsidian and punches and vice versa). When a variable tracking only handstones not forming part of sets was evaluated, it actually slightly weakened the regression ($R^2 = 40.7$), despite the evident overlap in spatial distribution between handstones and obsidian and punches. The explanation for this counterintuitive result is that the regression assesses individual burials as cases, whereas the pattern observed is on the level of the cluster and the neighborhood. This example reinforces the utility of treating burial data as the results of community action.

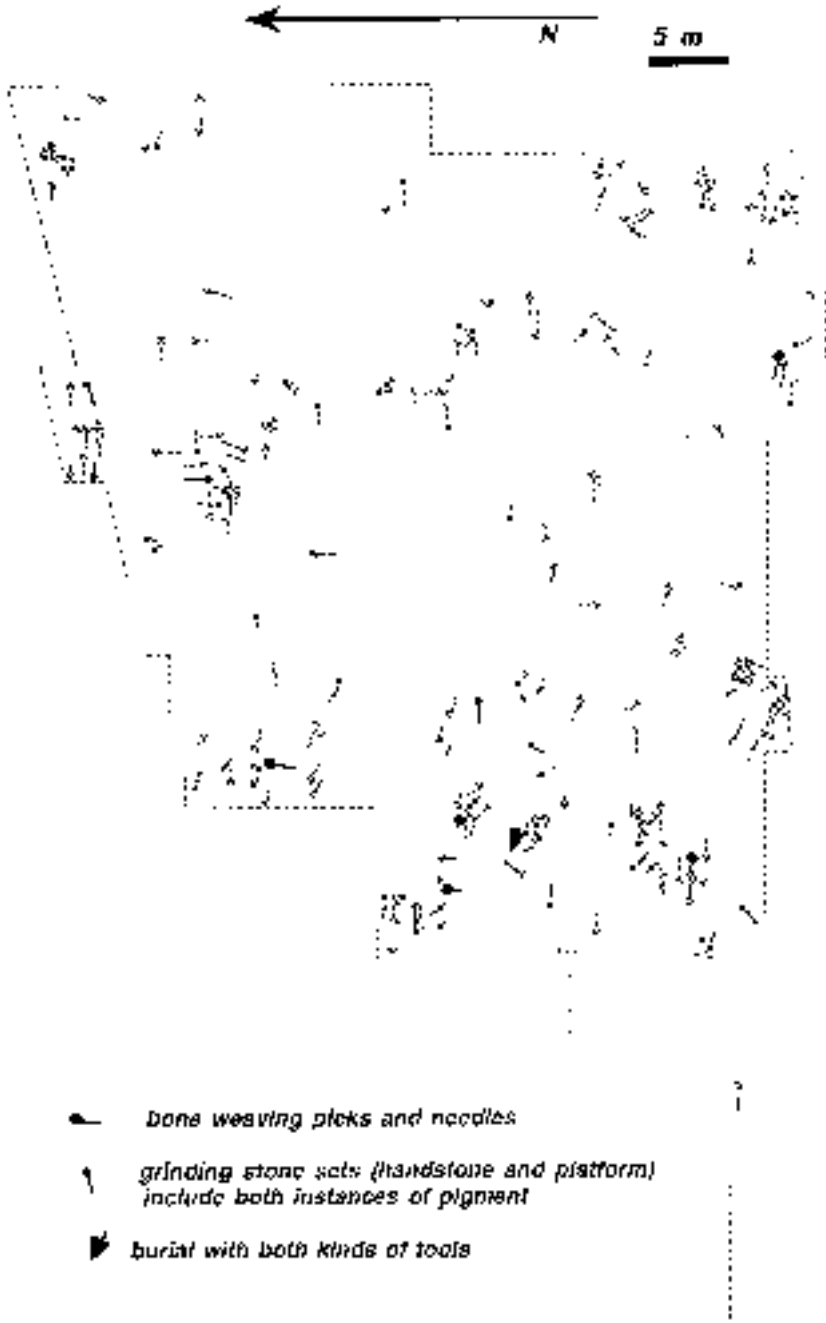


Fig. 6 Weaving tools and grinding stone sets in graves at Tlatilco. The orientation of each burial is indicated by the enlarged end of the symbol. Burials without weaving tools or grinding stone sets are light gray.

Social Dimensions of Pre-Classic Burials

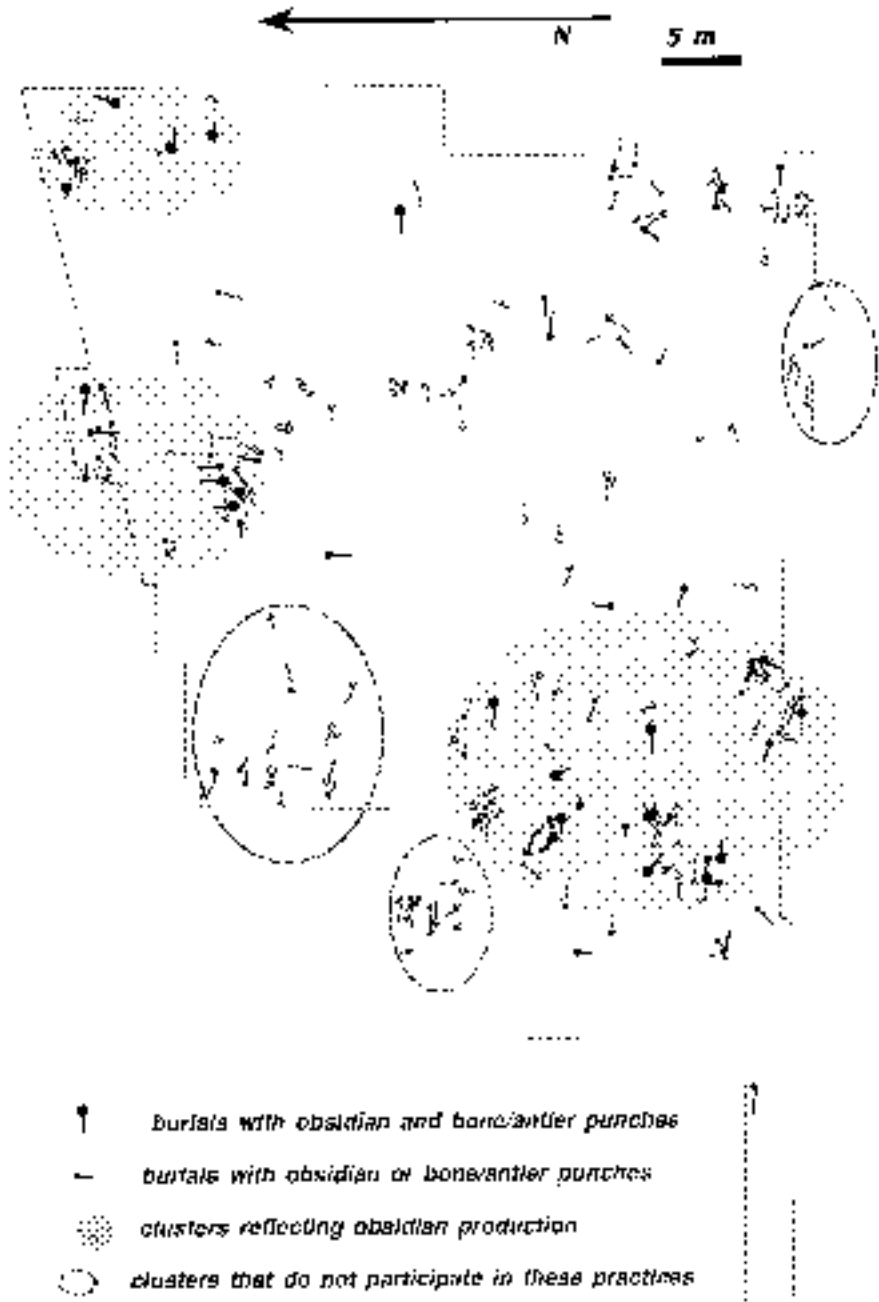


Fig. 7 Clusters with obsidian and obsidian production tools in graves at Tlatilco. The orientation of each burial is indicated by the enlarged end of the symbol. Burials without obsidian or obsidian production tools are light gray.

possible rationale for this association could be the use of handstones in an obsidian industry based on smashing of nodules identified in the same region and time period (Tolstoy 1989: 96; Boksenbaum et al. 1987: 67–68). Such a hammer-and-anvil, or bipolar, industry produces typical debitage, including bipolar cores and large numbers of flakes (Bordaz 1970: 14–15, 19–20; Kuijt and Russell 1993), the predominant form of obsidian in the Temporada IV burials. Ian Kuijt (personal communication, 1993) identified seven of the obsidian flakes illustrated in the Tlatilco catalogue as formally likely to represent bipolar cores, and concurs that the handstones illustrated are consistent with such an industry.¹⁰ The strength of the association of these distinctive by-products with bone or antler tools suggests that the latter were used in retouch of flakes produced by bipolar reduction (compare Bordaz 1970: 16, 19, 27, 80–85). When the distribution of evidence for the bipolar industry was mapped, independently of the presence of products of the rarer core/blade industry, it became clear that the southwestern and north central clusters were particularly distinguished as loci with evidence of this technology (Fig. 8).

Obsidian production was important enough to be featured in the mortuary practices of select clusters at Tlatilco. Two neighborhoods of the site have particularly intense emphasis on obsidian and its production tools and by-products in burials. While the association of obsidian, bone or antler punches, and handstones in certain burials could allow the identification of these as the remains of individuals active in obsidian production, the stronger pattern evident is between clusters as a whole and obsidian production. By including these items in mortuary ritual, the survivors placed one of the activities that marked, not solely the individual, but the group, on display. The preserved evidence for textile production and for manufacturing processes employing sets of handstones is less abundant. Nonetheless, the inclusion of these tools in burials similarly implies not just the activities employing them but also the social recognition of these kinds of labor by the group, as part of the highlighted practices of mortuary ritual.

While I have argued that the wearing of costume is the strongest medium for individuation present in Pre-Classic burials, the distribution of costume ornaments also suggests that an emphasis on costume was more characteristic of certain groups at Tlatilco. Sixteen individuals, including seven adult females

¹⁰ The specific objects Kuijt singled out are: probable bipolar core: Burial 46 (4 individuals); Burial 80 (4); Burial 81 (4); Burial 145 (3); classic bipolar core: Burial 53 (3); Burial 82 (1); Burial 121 (5); where the object number in parentheses corresponds to the catalogue. Burial 107 (15) is a probable chert bipolar core.



Fig. 8 Distribution of core/blade and bipolar obsidian industries in graves at Tlatilco. The orientation of each burial is indicated by the enlarged end of the symbol. Burials without products of core/blade or bipolar obsidian industries are light gray.

and six adult males, were buried wearing costume in the excavated area.¹¹ Ear ornaments and bead belts were worn only by males. Necklaces are found with females more often than expected. These differences hint at patterns of gender-specific costume elaboration like those evident in later Mesoamerican societies.

Multiple individuals in certain clusters were buried wearing costume (Fig. 9). In clusters with one or more individuals buried wearing costume, the number of other individuals accompanied by costume ornaments not worn at the time of interment was higher than expected. Burials within these clusters were also more likely overall to incorporate exotic, imported material. Fragments of polished iron ore not worn as costume were included in eight burials, seven in the clusters marked by costume elaboration. In contrast, only three of six burials with shell or bone ornaments not worn as costume were found in these clusters.¹²

The cluster-level emphasis on the inclusion of costume ornaments within burials is strong in the same clusters that also included significant numbers of burials with obsidian production tools. Together these two patterns suggest the possibility that slight but perceptible and, more important, publicly marked differentials in the consumption of imported materials existed between residential groups. These patterns could be interpreted as evidence that obsidian-working houses were displaying their wealth during mortuary ceremony.

At the same time that the practice of interring the dead in costume can be seen as a group-level behavior, it also, quite clearly, distinguishes individuals. Four burials—two young adult women, one young adult male, and one older male—wore costumes that included greenstone beads and iron ore pendants. Each of these was unique in its particular cluster. Other costumed individuals in the same clusters wore only shell, bone, or stone ornaments (including greenstone). Thus the presence of an iron ore pendant distinguishes the most elabo-

¹¹ I examined the drawing of each burial to ensure that the ornaments were in proper relative position to have formed part of costume, because the catalogue does not consistently indicate when ornaments were worn. I recorded examples of ear ornaments, necklaces (with/without pendants), bracelets (with/without pendants), necklace with pendant and bracelets, ear ornaments with necklace, bracelet, and anklet, and one belt accompanied by bracelets.

¹² While later Mesoamerican practices would lead to the expectation that greenstone was a prized substance, greenstone beads not used in costume were distributed in the same fashion as shell or bone beads: two of four cases in costume-emphasizing clusters. The single jade beads found in all of these cases may relate not to costume but to the practice of placing jade beads in the mouth of the deceased, common in the Pre-Classic from Cuella (Robin and Hammond 1991) to Oaxaca (Drennan 1976).

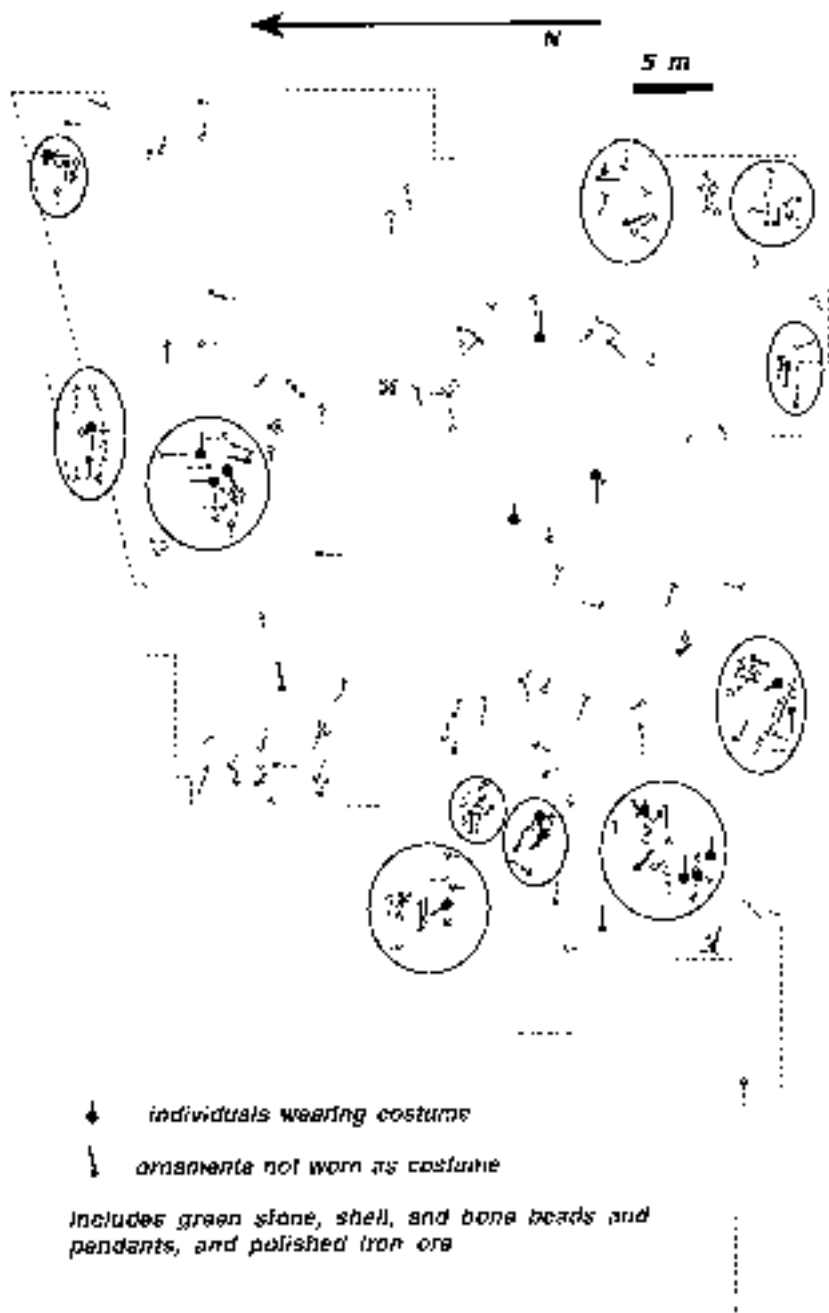


Fig. 9 Distribution of costume and costume ornaments in graves at Tlatilco. The orientation of each burial is indicated by the enlarged end of the symbol. Burials without costume ornaments are light gray.

rately dressed individual in each of the clusters that emphasize costume, consonant with Tolstoy's (1989: 109–112) identification of iron ore mirrors as restricted to the highest rank within the site. As in ethnographic house societies, each group may have had an internal hierarchy symbolized by particular badges of rank. At Tlatilco, we may be seeing the development of codified emblems of status within the shared practice of competitive costume elaboration, or beautification.

CONFORMITY BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

Where Pre-Classic burials divorced from residential compounds are found, costume is the single most consistent element of burial assemblages. My own analyses of burials in nonresidential loci at La Venta (Joyce n.d.a) and Los Naranjos (Joyce n.d.b), Marcia Merry de Morales' (1987) study of the unique burials in mound PC-4 at Chalcatzingo (see also Grove and Gillespie 1992), and John Clark's (n.d.) analysis of burials from Chiapa de Corzo demonstrate shared features of this development. Within sites, there are pronounced regularities in the burials in these locations. In addition, some features of these burials are similar at widely separated sites, suggesting the possibility that individuals involved in these mortuary rites participated in practices that transcended the local sphere.

A unique burial of this kind at the Honduran site of Los Naranjos (Baudez and Becquelin 1973: 49, 91–93), added to a monumental-scale mound in a second construction phase, featured a costumed individual unaccompanied by pottery vessels, otherwise consistent inclusions in elaborate Pre-Classic Honduran burials. On the summit of the platform a single individual was buried wearing a jade collar and double-strand belt, with two enormous earflares placed above the head, perhaps as part of a largely perishable headdress. This costume is comparable to examples from Chalcatzingo and La Venta (Merry de Morales 1987; Joyce n.d.a) that combine a double-strand greenstone belt and wide earflares.

The primary burial at Los Naranjos was accompanied by three other sets of human skeletal elements, one composed of two crania, all placed at the base of the platform along with a greenstone celt and red pigment. The use of greenstone celts and red pigment is also a feature of costumed burials in public architectural contexts at Chalcatzingo and La Venta (Merry de Morales 1987; Joyce n.d.a). More generally, the deposits at Los Naranjos resemble a series of human skeletal elements and arrangements of celts that mark the center line of a contemporary platform at San Isidro, Chiapas (Lowe 1981: 243–252). These caches may incorporate human skeletal remains as features of deposits which

mark this as a ritual space, rather than commemorating the individual from whom they were derived. In this respect, they recall Cynthia Robin and Norman Hammond's (1991) characterization of some individuals in Pre-Classic mass burials at Cuello as human grave goods (see also Hammond, this volume), signaling a marked differentiation of such individuals from the individuals for whose burial rites their bodies were appropriated.

The Los Naranjos burial reflects practices distributed widely across Mesoamerica. The formalization of costume and abstraction of the burial from a shared location within the residential compound is correlated with the absence of pottery vessels, signifiers of sociality. In similar contexts at Chalcatzingo and La Venta, standardized sets of pottery were included. David Grove and Susan Gillespie (1992) describe the pairs of small jugs and bowls present in both of the costumed burials in Chalcatzingo PC-4 and in two burials in the elite household, PC-1, and compare them to others at La Venta. The standardization of this inclusion across these two sites and within Chalcatzingo across different burial locations is probably indicative of ritual practices shared by the elite members of Chalcatzingo society and the elite of La Venta, and marks these individuals as different from others interred locally and participants in a practice transcending the local sphere.

The use of earspools and bead belts is characteristic of burials at La Venta, Chalcatzingo, and Los Naranjos, and suggests the possibility that these costume elements were interregionally recognized status badges. They would simultaneously mark the distinction of those wearing the costume from local people not entitled to use these ornaments and the affiliation of those individuals with a wider network of people. As John Clark and Michael Blake (1994: 19) put it, "Effective competition at the community level requires aggrandizers to traffic outside their home communities and establish significant ties to individuals elsewhere, preferably other aggrandizers who also seek outside contacts." Based on an analysis of costume and objects included in burials at La Venta and comparison with depictions of individuals in Pre-Classic art, I have suggested that costumes including bead belts and earspools with pendants were worn by elite males (Joyce n.d.a), the category of persons that Clark and Blake (1994: 30) suggest would have tended to monopolize the aggrandizer positions. But while aggrandizers' efforts are personal, in house societies they reflect prestige on other members of the residential group on whose efforts they rely. At Chalcatzingo and La Venta, the same privileged burial location was shared by other individuals lacking interregionally constant badges. I have argued that some of these individuals may be female members of the elite, sharing the distinction of greenstone costume and the large-scale mortuary ritual that in-

terment in mound architecture implies (Joyce n.d.a). Juveniles of prestigious houses might also be accorded distinguished burial, particularly insofar as they represent the human embodiment of alliances through which competitive houses expand their influence and resources (compare Annette Weiner's description of the gifts of shell ornaments that men involved in *kula* gave to their children; 1976: 129, 180–181).

Children were among the subjects of distinctive practices of burial costuming identified in an analysis of more than 70 burials from Chiapa de Corzo from both mound and nonmound locations (Clark n.d.). More than half of the burials were from a cemetery. All adults, except those that may be human burial goods, were accompanied by objects including pottery vessels and costume ornaments. John Clark defined strata of burials distinguished by elaborate costume and sumptuary goods, and demonstrated the presence of two sets of costume elements restricted to individuals buried in very different locations within the site. In burials placed in mound summits, sometimes including sacrificial victims, individuals wore jade earspools, jade and shell bead necklaces, some with marine shell pectorals, and bracelets, and what are described as greenstone breechcloths, perhaps a variant of the bead belt. Both adults and children shared in this pattern, although children wore incomplete versions of the costume. The presence of shell pectorals distinguished the individuals buried on principal mound summits from all others. Clark relates the individuals with this burial pattern to others from nonmound locations who shared the quantity of elaborate pottery vessels and had bead ornaments with less diverse material but lacked jade earspools.

A contrasting group of burials, never placed in mounds, wore distinctive greenstone tube ear ornaments, some with shell pendants, and carved shell pectoral ornaments with specific distinctive imagery. Within this group, variation was noted between individuals with complete costume and others with just one major ornament. All the juveniles of this group, buried in the cemetery, were without the large shell or jade earplugs or pectoral ornaments, but had at least one jade bead and numerous shell beads. In contrast to the mound burials, these individuals sometimes had utilitarian objects in their graves, including stamps.

Clark interprets the two sets of costume ornaments (which are only schematically summarized here) as badges of a political elite (with access to burial in mounds) and religious specialists (buried elsewhere). Both groups were marked by standardized costumes. Juveniles of each group have incomplete costumes, and Clark suggests that the full costume was a prerogative gained through maturation to adult status. Features of the costumes of the political elite buried in

mounds follow some of the standards seen at La Venta, Chalcatzingo, and Los Naranjos, while the shell ear pendants of the possible ritual specialists are specific to the region of Chiapa de Corzo. The association of costume with aspects of personal identity, in this case age, is preserved even as costuming practices are standardized to differentiate corporate groups within the site and link one group to elites elsewhere in Mesoamerica. Differences in the scale of burial facility correlate with apparent participation in widespread networks and with perhaps the most powerful expression of social difference that can be employed, the use of the bodies of others to enhance mortuary rites.

CONCLUSIONS

In Pre-Classic Mesoamerica, residential compound burials preserve the outlines of the creation of personal identity and personal power within the context of group-specific mortuary ritual. Mound burials embody personal identity completely abstracted from the residential group context and its social claims. Along with the movement from burial within residential compounds to burial in the larger architectural settings that create public space in Pre-Classic sites, there is a standardization of costume and, in some sites, restriction of the use of costume ornaments to certain burial sites. Where costume was used within the residential setting, perhaps as a medium to compete for influence by increasing attractiveness, unique costumes were composed from the shared forms and materials of ornaments specific to each society. In contrast, individuals buried in prominent nonresidential locations wear costumes that are standardized within communities and even in some cases between communities.

Burial practices within residential compounds provide the ground against which nonresidential burial practices were distinguished. Some of the distinctions in costume that become standardized, particularly the use of earspools and bead belts, may have already been in place within residential groups at sites like Tlatilco. At Tlatilco, we may see in distinctive burial practices that singled out certain households the competitive processes through which houses sought and gained lasting advantages that allowed their descendants to claim differential status. These practices include the consumption of rare or elaborated materials in mortuary rituals that would have displayed, to members of allied houses, the wealth of the house and its members and their confidence in their ability to replace the goods consigned to the earth. In ethnographic house societies, house treasures and wealth serve to seal alliances that provide the promise of labor necessary to ensure production sufficient to support the house and allow it to expand its influence. The alliances contracted, often through marriage, are regularly reinforced throughout life by exchanges, reciprocal feasting, and shared

ritual. In death, the alliances are not dissolved. Rather, the bonds established are reformulated through the dead individual who becomes a permanent link, an ancestor.

The creation of unprecedented forms of social relations characterizes the Pre-Classic. Materially, some of the obvious features associated with these new developments include architecture of extraordinary scale, elaboration of craft items used in display, and pan-regional use of certain materials, symbols, and practices, all drawn into play in burial. Differential use of these materials comes to characterize the elite, but explanations of their Pre-Classic development cannot assume the preexistence of a privileged group. Rather, these features must be viewed as “used or reinvested in forging social alliances,” as Kenneth Hirth has argued for Pre-Classic exchange: “Archaeologists must discard the notion that the circulation of primitive valuables through interregional exchange networks was stimulated by a desire to obtain status markers . . . and begin to examine the more specific ways in which primitive valuables are used in the formation of social hierarchy” (Hirth 1992: 23). The very elaboration of Pre-Classic burials, the scale of goods consumed even within villages with relatively modest populations and low levels of status differentiation, such as Tlatilco and Playa de los Muertos, strongly suggest that mortuary ritual was one of the arenas through which status was manipulated, concepts of value formed, and avenues opened for the assertion of legitimate individual distinction in Pre-Classic Mesoamerica.

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