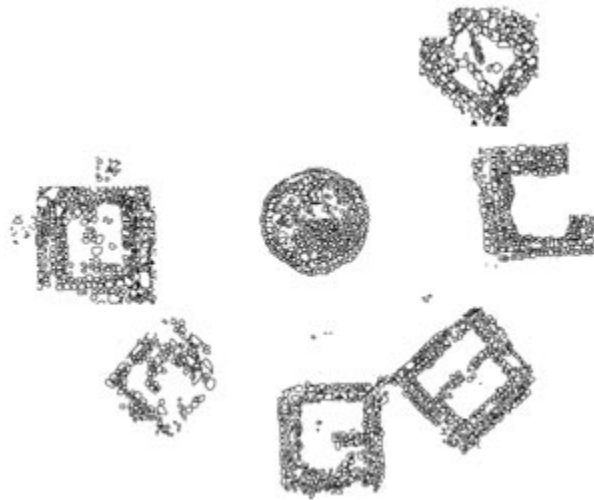


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**Public Architecture: Navajas, Jalisco, México**

*With contributions by Gregory Tyndall, Bruce Benz, Sarah Jennings, Kathy Beekman, and Bruno Calgaro.*



**Research Year:** 2003

**Culture:** Teuchitlán

**Chronology:** Late Pre-Classic

**Location:** Jalisco, México

**Site:** Navajas

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## **Abstract**

The Teuchitlán tradition was a regional complex society centered in the lake basins of Jalisco, México, defined by the use of concentric circular public architecture. Survey and piecemeal excavations have unfortunately dominated archaeological research into this society. The project carried out a horizontal exposure excavation of Circle 5 at the site of Navajas, with associated soil sampling for macrobotanical analysis. Data recovered has allowed a closer comparison of the different components of an entire small circle. We evaluate current models suggesting that feasting accompanied social competition between the different kin groups believed to be associated with the circle, and that agricultural ritual may have been a central component of an ideology that justified the actions of elites.

## **Resumen**

La tradición de Teuchitlán fue una sociedad compleja regional localizada en las cuencas laguneras de Jalisco, México, definida por una forma distintiva de arquitectura pública circular. Desafortunadamente, fueron los reconocimientos y excavaciones hechos por partes los que predominaron en las investigaciones arqueológicas de esta sociedad. En el proyecto se llevaron a cabo excavaciones horizontales en el Círculo 5 del sitio de Navajas, junto con un muestreo limitado de suelos para realizar análisis macrobotánicos. Los datos reunidos nos permiten hacer un análisis más detallado y hacer comparaciones entre las estructuras que componen un círculo pequeño completo. Con estos datos podremos evaluar modelos teóricos que plantean que los festejos acompañaban a las competencias sociales entre distintos grupos de parentesco que supuestamente estaban asociados con el círculo. También discutimos la relevancia del Círculo 5 para plantear la importancia del ritual agrícola como componente de la ideología política.

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## **Project Background and Goals**

The project carried out the near complete horizontal exposure of a small circular complex of the Teuchitlán tradition, with associated soil sampling for macrobotanical analysis. The work took place at the site of Navajas, in the central part of the state of Jalisco, México ([Figure 1](#), shown below).



**Figure 1. Central México, with the study area marked.**

The Teuchitlán tradition (300 B.C.-A.D. 900) (see [Figure 2](#), below, for chronological sequence over this period) is defined by the presence of distinctive circular public architecture (Weigand 1985) consisting of successive concentric circles—(1) a circular altar, (2) a wider circular patio, and (3) a ring of equally spaced satellite structures facing the patio. The total complex is the unit of analysis, and the individual elements listed above do not occur without the others. By midway through the Late Formative (around A.D. 1) the circles typically have eight structures surrounding an altar or large round pyramid. This architecture is predominantly found in the highland lake basins of central Jalisco, with smaller and derivative examples in the surrounding seven states.

Available evidence from ancient ceramic dioramas of the architecture, other TVRAP excavations, skeletal data, and ethnographic parallels point to the likelihood that the structures around the circle were built, maintained, and used by different kin groups (Pickering and Cabrero 1998, Beekman 2000, Beekman n.d.). There is other evidence, namely the large quantities of wealth conspicuously buried with the dead, suggesting that these groups were in social competition (Beekman 2000). Yet despite the association of competing descent groups with the satellite structures, recall that a typical circle includes eight surrounding structures. Whatever their competing interests, the component social groups were compelled to cooperate as well, likely through the evocation of a higher purpose—ensuring the well-being of the populace at large, for example (Beekman 2003a, b).

Date	Ceramic Phases (based on Galvan, Beekman)
900	El Grillo
800	
700	
600	
500	Late Tabachines
	?
400	
300	
200	Middle Tabachines
A.D. 100	
0	
	Early Tabachines
100 B.C.	
200	

Figure 2. Central portion of the chronological sequence for the Tequila valleys of central Jalisco.

The activities within the circles are thus diverse. There is evidence in burials and ceramic dioramas for mortuary ritual involving conspicuous consumption and social competition between groups. Other dioramas depict ceremonies comparable to the Xocotl Huetzi monthly agricultural celebrations known from the Aztec ritual calendar, and excavations at Llano Grande support that conjecture (Beekman 2003a, b). Some models further depict drinking and feasting that may be part of these activities, but are likely to leave their own distinctive archaeological signature such as large storage and serving vessels (Butterwick 1998).

Based on prior excavations at Llano Grande and the research on the ceramic models by Butterwick (1998), we can conclude with confidence that ritual feasting activity was taking place in the circles (Dietler and Hayden 2001, Hayden 2000). Knowing this, the focus of study can be shifted to the type of feasting that was occurring. Potter (2000:472) states that there are "two sides to all communal behaviors: one that integrates and one that differentiates." In accordance with this statement, Tyndall (in preparation) emphasizes two overlapping classes of feasting: Aggrandizing Feasting where groups were using the ceremonial circles as a public arena to compete with one another through feasting to gain personal prestige, and Integrating feasting where the feasts were social events that brought together many different groups in integrative and celebratory fashion. Tyndall draws a connection between these two kinds of feasting and the evidence for alternating Network and Corporate strategies (Blanton, *et al.* 1996) already proposed (Beekman 2000) for the core area over the Early through Late Tabachines phases (est. 300 B.C.-A.D. 550).

On this basis, Tyndall proposes that a network strategy emphasizing greater differentiation between independent lineages would result in differing ceramic assemblages between structures around the circle. At the other end of the continuum, very similar ceramic assemblages between structures would point towards similar activities and greater ties between the interacting lineages, and would be more likely to be found within a corporate strategy.

## **Navajas**

The site of Navajas was a significant Teuchitlán tradition political center in its own right ([Figure 3](#)). It has five circles of various sizes, an 80+ meter long ballcourt, about 80 hectares of mapped area, multiple secondary centers in its orbit (La Florida, El Jaguey, and Los Coates), and dominance of a major transportation corridor linking the Tequila valleys and Lake Chapala to the southeast. It may be the second largest intact center of the Teuchitlán tradition known at present, but its remains are in especial danger due to mechanized agriculture, disinterest, and looting.

The current project focused on Circle 5, a very small example of a circle of the Teuchitlán tradition ([Figure 4](#)). To date, Teuchitlán tradition excavations have been limited to shallow trenching and clearing aimed towards architectural restoration and consolidation (Guachimontón), or selective excavations to expose activity areas within individual structures (Llano Grande). This piecemeal excavation of circles is unsatisfactory, as we are beginning to recognize that the complexes are a composite of eight different social units. Circle 5's small size made it possible to carry out horizontal excavations to better understand the interrelationship of the different components of the circle.

# Navajas Municipio de Tala Jalisco

C. Beekman  
G. Tyndall  
TVRAP 2002

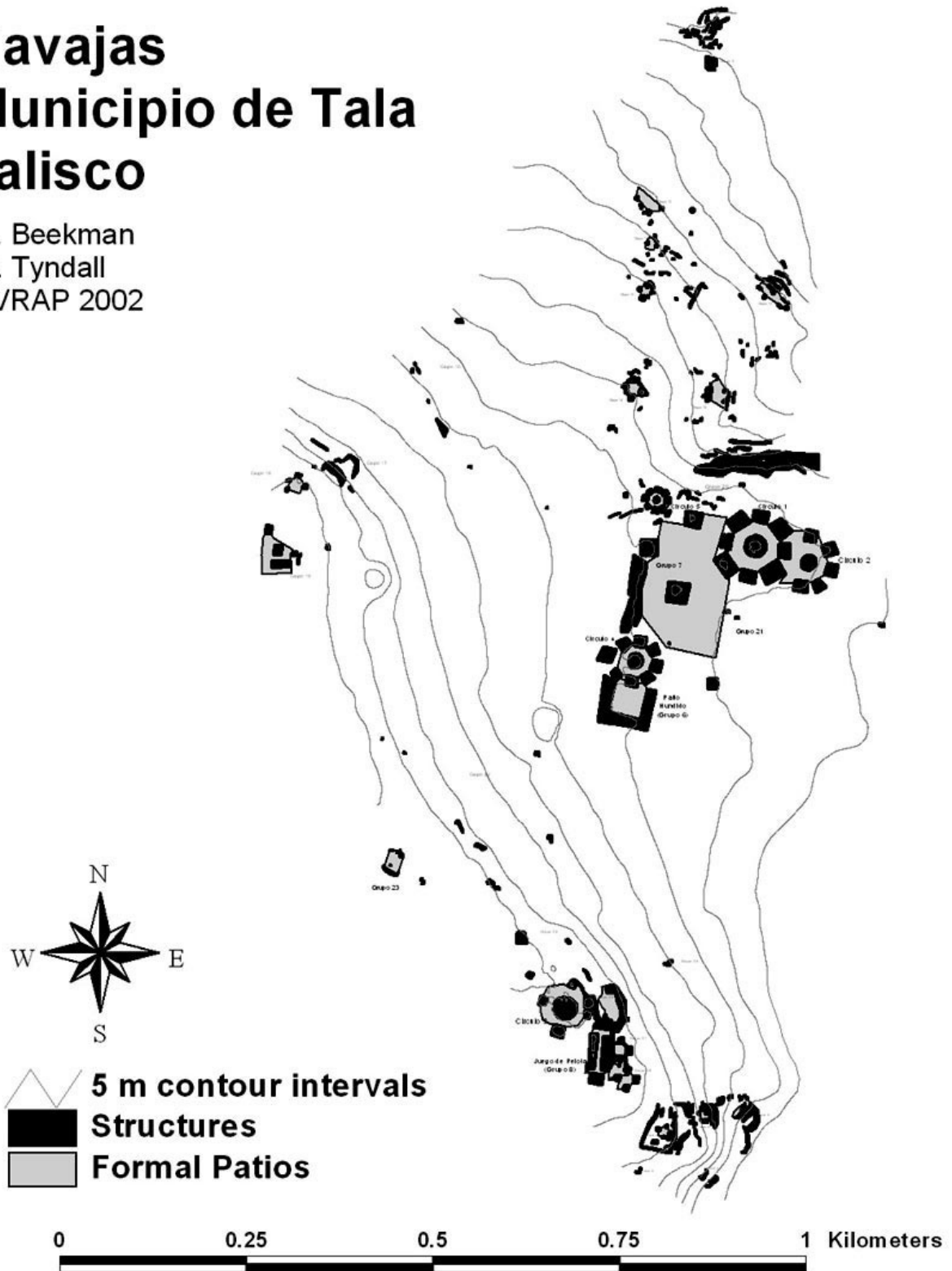


Figure 3. Map of the site of Navajas.

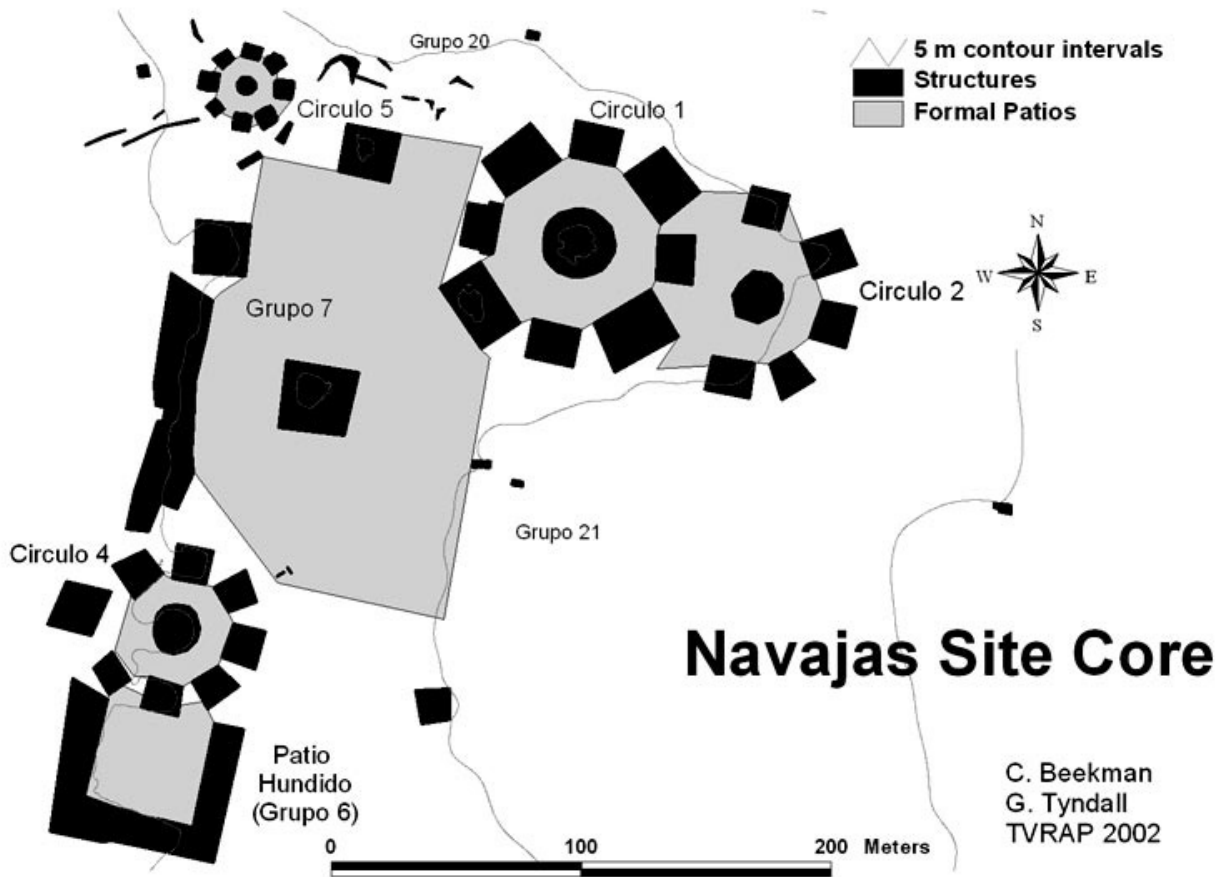
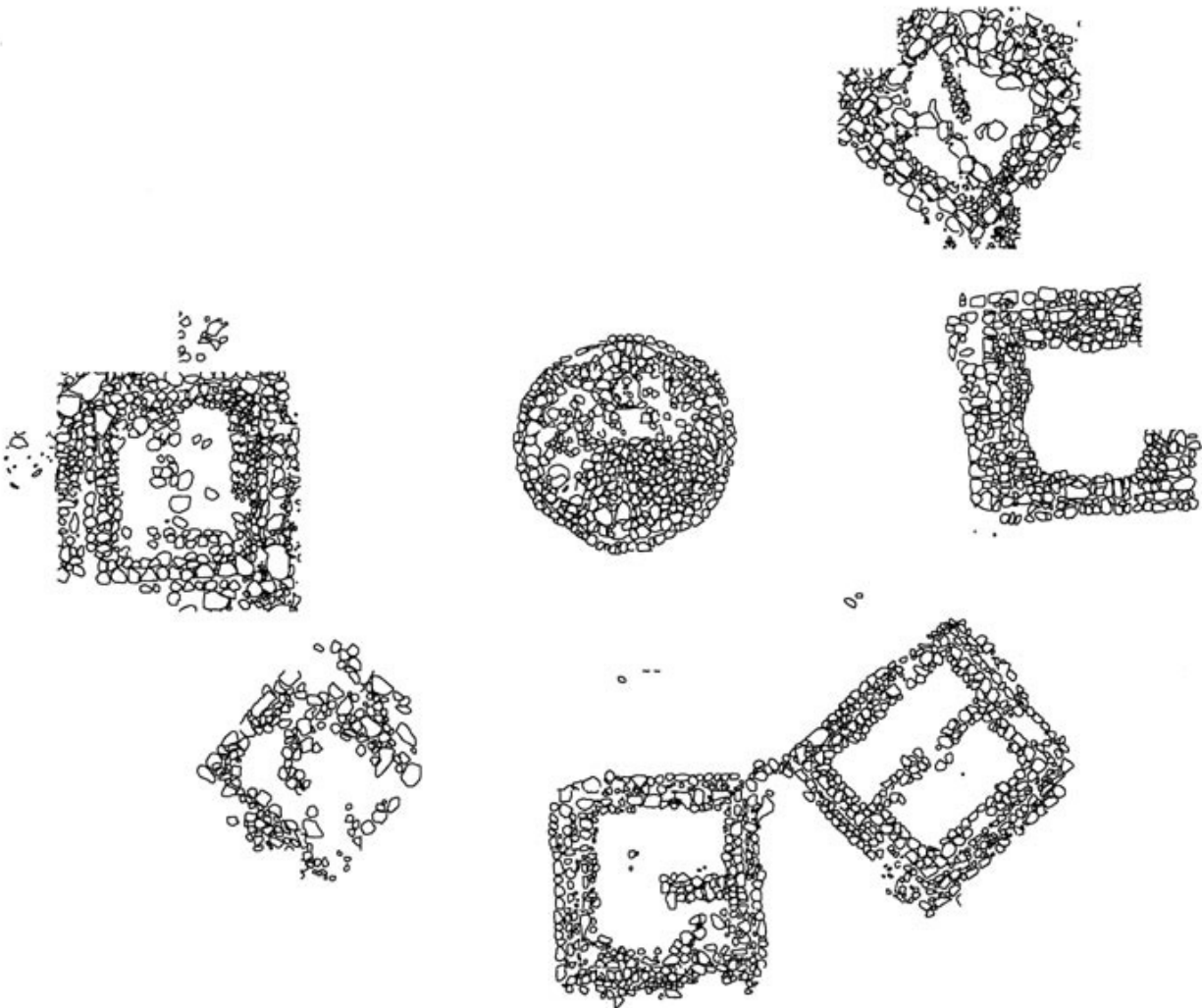


Figure 4. The Navajas site center, with Circle 5 marked.

## Fieldwork

The FAMSI-funded project carried out the proposed horizontal excavations of Circle 5 at Navajas from early February through about the 1st of April, 2003 (Figure 5). There were some changes to the original plan that increased the price of the macrobotanical analysis and reduced the number of samples that could be analyzed with the budget available. Second, permit issues with the INAH required us to compress our work schedule, and carry out the work over a shorter period of time using a greater number of workers. The excavations exposed seven of the nine structures of Circle 5 (counting the altar), and the majority of the patio floor surface. Using our system of nomenclature combining the group number and the structure number, these are structures 5-2, 5-3, 5-4, 5-5, 5-6, 5-7, and Altar 5-9. The remaining two structures (on the northwestern and northern edges of the circle) were too heavily damaged by looting to excavate. Most of the structure wall lines were visible from the surface, but the amount of overburden turned out to be much greater than anticipated. Despite this, we were able to investigate the interior of all six platforms and the altar. Soil samples were taken when it was

possible to clearly identify structure or patio floors. This was more of a challenge than originally supposed because of the typical deposition of structural collapse atop the floor, which was often of the same or similar composition to the floor itself. Dr. Bruce Benz of Texas Wesleyan University has kindly analyzed the soil samples for macrobotanical remains. The ceramics have since been the subject of a Master's Thesis by Gregory Tyndall at the University of Colorado at Denver, UCD alumnus Sarah Jennings has studied aspects of the architecture, and I am currently trying to interest a student in working with the obsidian collection. Results to date are discussed below.



**Figure 5. Partial plan map of the excavated portions of Circle 5, Navajas. Assembled by Melissa Grote.**



## Results

Excavated ceramics date the circle to the Middle Tabachines phase (est. A.D. 1-200). Middle Tabachines sherds appear in all contexts, including the earliest sealed floor assemblages in three of the structures. The data from the project impact upon several issues that have interested us regarding activities within the Teuchitlán tradition circles.

First, the pattern of construction at the different structures around the circle continues to support Beekman's earlier proposal at Llano Grande that different social groups are involved in the construction of each structure. First, based on the fact that circles of the Teuchitlán tradition are not found missing one of their components, we assume that all the structures and the altar were constructed at the same time. Similar construction methods were utilized for each structure, but with variation in effort as demonstrated by differing labor investment, and variation in trajectory as demonstrated by differing construction histories. All were originally built as a stone outline with an interior floor at the same level as the surrounding ground surface. The surrounding walls were generally half a meter in height, and composed of multiple rows of stone laid side by side. Structures 5-2 and 5-7 made significant use of extremely large boulders within their walls, while Structures 5-3, 5-4, and 5-5 were built strictly with transported stones. Structure 5-6 received the least effort of the entire group, and this is very noticeable in the accompanying figure of the circle. All of these foundations would have supported perishable structures with peaked roofs (depicted nicely in the ceramic models—e.g. Von Winning and Hammer 1972: 17-21, Figures 2-5), and we found very large quantities of fired clay daub that formed the outer skin over the perishable construction. The floors of structures 5-2, 5-4, and 5-5 were later raised to a height level with the surrounding walls, making them true platforms. The other structures were left with an "empty" interior and entry must have required stepping up onto the surrounding wall and then stepping back down into the interior. Some lateral expansion of the structures may have taken place, as their side walls were often composed of parallel rows of stone laid side by side (see [Figure 5](#)), and it is difficult to determine when these were added. Many of these issues are discussed by Jennings (2004).

The construction of the altar 5-9 was a microcosm of the variation noted across the circle as a whole. The basic form of the altar was of two adjacent rings of stone forming the outline, with a mixed array of fill types in the interior. Prior to adding fill to the altar, part of the interior surface was heavily burned. The fill in the southern half of the altar was carefully placed and tightly packed stone, while the northern half was a more serendipitous mixture of stone and the artificial earth mix that is commonly employed for fill. The altar therefore includes two fundamentally different fill methods in spatially discrete zones, suggesting two cooperating labor groups.

Although some circles have been found to have shaft tombs directly beneath the surrounding satellite structures (Huitzilapa [Ramos and Lopez 1996], El Arenal), this was fortunately not the case with Circle 5. No burials or caches were found anywhere in the circle. Fragments of small solid figurines and even of the large hollow figures known to art historians the world over were found within several of the structures of Circle 5, demonstrating once and for all that the figures were not limited to tomb furniture, but

were also used in some fashion within these surface structures. Given the argument that lineages were the social groups active within each of the structures, it seems particularly likely that the figures found in the shaft tombs represented lineage heads or similar personages.

Another form of ceremonialism associated with other circles of the Teuchitlán tradition is the presence of a posthole in the center of the altar, clearly corresponding to the poles represented in PreColumbian ceramic models of the circles. As described earlier, the ceremonialism depicted seems to best correspond to something similar to the Aztec calendrical ceremony *Xocotl Huetzi*, probably a first fruits ritual. Altar holes have been found at Guachimontón (Phil Weigand, personal communications 2000-2003) and Llano Grande. Surprisingly, no such feature was found in Altar 5-9 in Circle 5, and the absence of this form of community ceremonialism is very interesting.

One artifact class that had been less anticipated was that of carved stones. Structures 5-1 (on surface), 5-2, 5-3, and 5-4 were each associated with stones of varying sizes and with differing classes of markings on them. The most common types of markings were what we refer to as "counting marks", in which a series of parallel lines were cut into the stone, frequently adding up to numbers from 4-8. The most spectacular carvings occurred in Structure 5-2 on carved stone S4, a very large stone weighing several hundred pounds. We documented more elaborate parallel and crisscrossing markings, x shapes, and one detailed cross motif from this stone. Most of the marked stones were actually construction material built into the walls of the structures, or rubble that may have originated in a structural position. The significance of the marks is still under investigation, but studies are underway to consider the possibility that astronomical observations may be implicated.

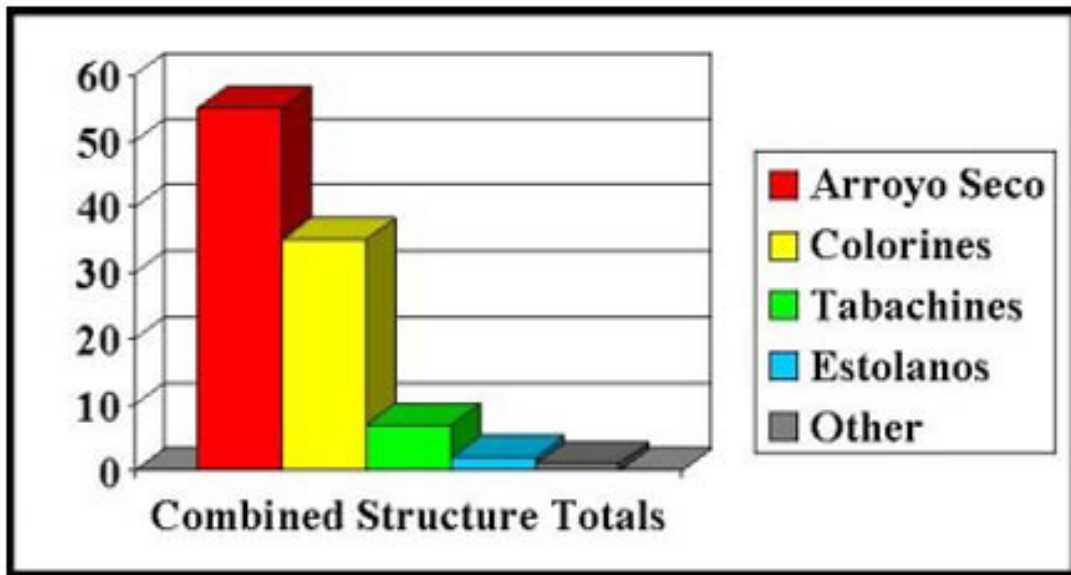


Figure 6. Distribution by weight of ceramic groups in Circle 5.

Tyndall's examination of the ceramics has been enlightening regarding the question of group activities in the circle and especially feasting. Tyndall used the ceramic typology for the region first outlined by Galvan (1991), expanded upon by Beekman and Weigand (2000), and since modified by Beekman. For this analysis he focused on the four distinct ceramic groups from the Tabachines phases—Arroyo Seco, Colorines, Tabachines, and Estolanos.

[Figure 6](#) represents the total weight of each group of sherds collected and catalogued from the interior of each of the six excavated structures in Circle 5 after eroded and unidentifiable sherds are removed. It clearly indicates that two types dominated the assemblage, the Arroyo Secos and the Colorines.

The Arroyo Seco sherds were generally fairly thick and mostly came from vessel forms such as large basins or vats, ollas with short necks, and bowls with nearly vertical walls. Almost all of the Arroyo Seco sherds we identified fit into the sub-classification of Rojo Amplio developed by Galván to describe the sherds that had a red slip on both their interior and exterior. The next major group was the Colorines sherds that made up 35% of the entire assemblage weight. This group was easily identified by its coarse paste with numerous inclusions. This aids in firing and in maintaining internal strength. Most Colorines vessels are utilitarian and are commonly found in the form of large ollas and bowls. When decoration existed on these sherds it was typically a poorly applied red or occasionally white paint on the exterior that in some instances displays a cross-hatch design. The more highly decorated Tabachines fine wares were noticeably scarce in this collection, contributing less than 10% of the total weight. The Tabachines sherds that we found were often in such poor shape that only the fine paste, thin walls, weight, and distinctive vessel forms made it possible to identify them. The same could be said for the somewhat thicker but equally fine Estolanos sherds in this collection that only made up 1% of the total weight. Only one sherd was found that was thought to have been from an imported vessel, and hence the entire collection appears to have been produced within the region.

As [Figure 7](#) shows, the general pattern seen across Circle 5 is largely repeated for each of the individual structures. The homogenous nature of the Circle 5 ceramic assemblage leads Tyndall to conclude that aggrandizing feasting was minimally important in this circle. The majority of the ceramics in this collection appear to have been from utilitarian vessels like ollas, bowls and serving platters that had very little decoration. Based on this, he concludes that the emergent elites were in the process of de-emphasizing local power and implementing a belief system that stressed the community over individual. The variations noted in the graph above will be examined in further detail in the coming months.

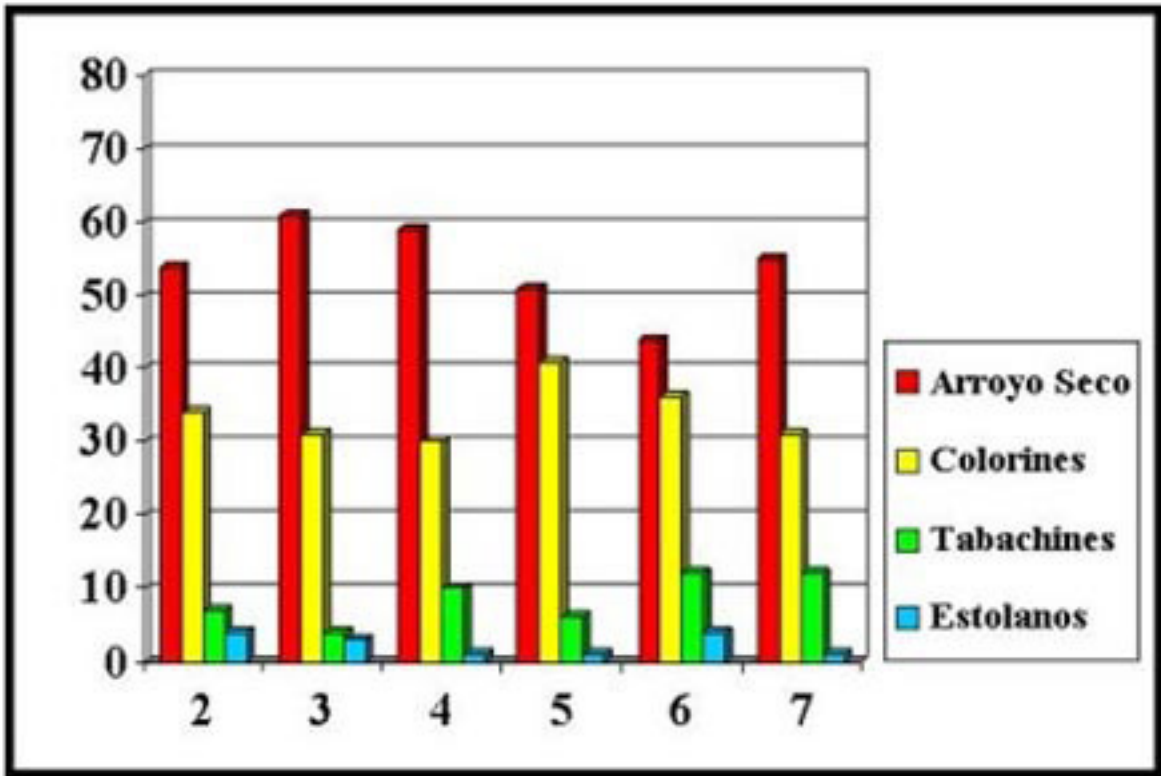


Figure 7. Distribution by weight of ceramic groups across structures of Circle 5.

The flotation and macrobotanical analysis was carried out by Bruce Benz (2004) on ten samples from Structures 5-2, 5-3, 5-4, 5-5, 5-7 and four from the patio, and present us with another angle on feasting. Numerous small friable fragments resembling the ends of long bones are common both within structures and on the patio floor. These might be the detritus of food preparation, although no faunal remains were otherwise noted during excavation. Pieces of charred maize cobs were identified in several structures, and may represent fuel although they were presumably part of the diet beforehand. Noncharred amaranthus seeds distinctive from typical modern domesticated varieties were identified from both structure (5-5 and 5-7) and patio contexts and may constitute PreColumbian remains. The very limited occurrence of large *Chenopodium* seeds on the floor of Structure 5-5 would appear to predate the next earliest known occurrence of this species in Mesoamerica at Early Classic Teotihuacán. *Chenopodium* is used as a medicinal or flavoring herb today. The macrobotanical remains at Circle 5 do not represent an extraordinarily diverse set of species, and if feasting was taking place within the circle, we might expect that other foods, quite possibly pulque as suggested by Butterwick (1998), were on the menu. Finally, the light presence of charred wood fragments throughout the circle suggests that the area was maintained and swept regularly.

In terms of the variation within Circle 5, there are distinctions both between the patio and the structures, and between structures. To begin with, patio units are diverse in

their assemblages. Structure floors differ from the patios in their greater number and variety of types of organic remains (seeds, wood, cob fragments), as one might expect within enclosed spaces, although Benz cautions that even the charred remains need not necessarily be part of the PreColumbian occupation. Structures vary considerably one from another, with maize in 5-2, 5-4, and 5-5, and *Chenopodium* in 5-5. Structures 5-3 and 5-7 seem to have been comparatively impoverished in macrobotanical remains, and Structure 5-5 seems to have had the greatest number and abundance of charred or non-charred putatively PreColumbian culturally relevant species. Diversity and intensity of activities seems most evident in Structure 5-5, which was also one of the more elaborately built structures, and is the only structure in which a metate was found seated directly atop the final floor.

Although only a preliminary analysis of the lithics has been completed at this point, there are rather clear distinctions in the stone tools found in the different structures with, for example, scrapers occurring in elevated quantities in Structure 5-7. This would seem to more clearly indicate different activities within the different structures, and future work needs to focus on these materials. The flotation analysis found obsidian microliths to be ubiquitous throughout both patio and structure floor samples, suggesting that lithic production took place within and around the structures.

## **Conclusions**

We would like to discuss the conclusions from the work at Circle 5 and explicitly compare them to the ceramic models of the circles that are known from art collections and publications (e.g. Von Winning and Hammer 1972, Townsend 1998) around the world. As we have already noted, however, the artifacts found within the circles have not tended to include those items of value (except for ceramic figures) that are so well known from the shaft tombs in the region. Although people clearly had access to jade, marine shell, and other prestige goods, these objects found their way into the tombs and they have not been very common within the contemporaneous circles.

The proposal that lineages are the basic social components of the circles remains a very intriguing proposition. The proposal was first plausibly made on the basis of skeletal data (Pickering and Cabrero 1998) and later on the basis of the structure to structure variation around the circle at Llano Grande (Beekman n.d., see also Beekman 2000). While the ceramic models cannot be said to depict lineages per se, they do tend to represent the structures around the circle as having external roof decoration that differs from one to the next (Von Winning and Hammer 1972: Figures 39, 59, 86). Symbolic signaling of this nature suggests that the builders/occupants of the different structures were emphasizing their differences, so the identification of some social group with the different structures seems to be implicated.

Current models of the activities within the circular public architecture emphasize the importance of feasting and ritual drinking in contests of prestige (Butterwick 1998), competition among elites for status and followers (Beekman 2000), or the symbolic

agricultural role of rulers (Beekman 2003a, b). The data from Navajas Circle 5 are relevant to each of these models. The analysis of the ceramics has tended to suggest that less competitive feasting was taking place at Circle 5 due to the homogeneity of the assemblages across structures. Communal feasting on the other hand seems quite likely, although we are somewhat surprised at the extremely high percentages of open thick-walled serving bowls. Such vessels are in fact represented in numerous ceramic models of the architecture showing group activities (e.g. Von Winning and Hammer 1972: Figures 20, 23, *passim*; Townsend 1998: 95, 133, *passim*; and collected in Butterwick 1998). The greater presence of macrobotanical remains (and perhaps very fragmentary faunal remains) inside the structures as opposed to the patios suggests either greater activity within the structures or else assiduous cleaning of the open spaces. The people associated with Structure 5-5 may have had a greater role in feasting activities as suggested by the greater quantities and diversity of macrobotanical remains, and by the presence of a metate *in situ* on the interior floor.

The evidence for both competition between social groups and the symbolic agricultural role of elites are interestingly absent in Circle 5. The designs on ceramic vessels are quite simple and imported ceramics are almost totally missing. The only exotic goods present are solid figurines and hollow figures, and burials are absent. Whatever role lineages played in Circle 5, the mortuary aspect had been removed to another location, and at least four cemeteries are known from the immediately surrounding region. The lack of a posthole in the center of the altar would seem to suggest that the agricultural ceremony so prominently depicted in the ceramic models (e.g. Von Winning and Hammer 1972: Figures 77-86; Townsend 1998: 144, 146, 147) was also absent at this circle. A circle similar to Circle 5 with a very large diameter altar was partly excavated at Guachimontón in 2002, and the excavators also could not identify a central posthole. This may be a chronological distinction, but this is hard to determine as yet since only the circle at Llano Grande (ca. A.D. 200-300) has been radiocarbon dated. Another possibility is that Circle 5 and its counterpart at Guachimontón were small and less formal examples of the Teuchitlán tradition architecture. This may well have impacted upon the activities carried out within them. This seems a very plausible explanation at present, and emphasizes that the circular architecture of the Teuchitlán tradition should not all be interpreted in the same way, and there may in fact be significant social differences between them. This may be especially true at smaller circles within a site that has several larger and more formal examples. A relatively simple circle like that excavated at Llano Grande was nevertheless the only one at that site, and it may have been correspondingly more generalized in the activities taking place there. This is an interesting question that has yet to be explored.

In sum, the project at Circle 5 has allowed us to evaluate the activities at a small circle of the Teuchitlán tradition, and compare those across different structures in a manner unexplored until this study. Support for this project has also aided in funding the training of graduate students in the region's archaeology. I do not consider this a trivial by-product of the research. Unlike some areas of Mesoamerica, western México has very few active field projects to support the growing number of students who are choosing to focus their career on this region. One of the most valuable aspects of FAMSI support

has been their contribution to encouraging and maintaining those young scholars whose attention has been drawn to the area.

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