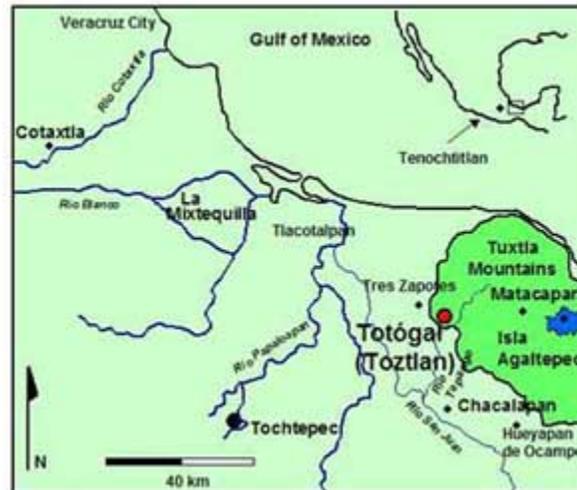


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Totógal: Investigations of Postclassic Occupation and the Aztec Frontier in the Tuxtla Mountains, Veracruz, México



Research Year: 2004

Culture: Veracruz

Chronology: Postclassic

Location: Cerro el Vigía, Sierra de los Tuxtlas, Veracruz, México

Site: Totógal

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Abstract

We initiated archaeological fieldwork at Totógal to examine the character of Postclassic (A.D. 1000-1521) occupation in the western Sierra de los Tuxtlas and to consider relations with the expanding Aztec empire. Archaeological data show that the principle occupation of Totógal dates to the Late Postclassic period (A.D. 1350-1521) and was preceded by an earlier Classic period one. We conducted systematic shovel testing, mapping, conductivity survey and excavation at Totógal. Late Postclassic imperial-style artifacts, obsidian trends and Gulf Lowland ceramic styles combined with ethnohistoric information and local histories, support a correlation between Totógal and Postclassic Toztlan, the easternmost tributary of the imperial Tochtepec province (Esquivias 2002; Urcid and Esquivias 2000; Venter 2004; cf. Berdan and Anawalt 1992). Moreover, these data indicate that the inhabitants of Totógal were engaged in both Gulf Lowland and Central Highland political, economic, and cultural networks.

Resumen

Iniciamos el Proyecto Arqueológico Santiago Tuxtla en Totógal para examinar el carácter de la ocupación Posclásica (1000-1521 d.C.) en la Sierra de los Tuxtlas y para considerar las relaciones con el imperio Azteca. Los datos arqueológicos muestran que la mayor ocupación fue Posclásica tardía. También existió una ocupación Clásica. Realizamos una prospección sistemática con pruebas de pala, mapeo, prospección por conductividad, excavación e inspección de pozos de saqueo. La cerámica del estilo azteca imperial, las fuentes de obsidiana y su tecnología, y los estilos cerámicos de las Tierras Bajas del Golfo así como los datos etnohistóricos e históricos sugieren una correlación entre Totógal y el Toztlan Posclásico, el tributario más oriental de la provincia de Tochtepec de la Triple Alianza (Carrasco 1999; Esquivias 2002; Urcid y Esquivias 2000; contra Berdan y Anawalt 1992). Además, estos datos indican que los habitantes de Totógal participaron en los sistemas políticos, económicos y culturales de las Tierras Bajas del Golfo y el Altiplano.

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Overview

From March to August of 2004 archaeological fieldwork was conducted at Totógal, a site located on the southern slopes of Cerro el Vigía near Santiago Tuxtla, Veracruz, México. According to Urcid and Esquivias (2000; see also Gerhard 1993), modern Santiago Tuxtla corresponds to 16th Century Tuxtla (Tustla) and to Toztlan (Figure 1, shown below), the easternmost tributary of the Aztec Empire's Tochtepec province (*Codex Mendoza* [Berdan and Anawalt 1992]). At the outset of this project, information from ethnohistory, local histories, and Postclassic artifacts suggested that the archaeological site of Totógal probably was prehispanic Tuxtla. This research was designed to explore Postclassic occupation (ca. A.D. 1000-1521) at Totógal, clarify the Postclassic chronology of the Sierra de los Tuxtlas, and determine the character of Aztec/local relations in this imperial frontier. Archaeologists have had difficulty in identifying evidence for Postclassic occupation in the Tuxtlas (e.g. Esquivias 2002; Killion and Urcid 2001; Pool 1995; Santley and Arnold 1996) and a recent reinterpretation of the Aztec domain placed Totógal and the Tuxtla Mountains beyond the imperial boundary (Berdan 1996; Berdan and Anawalt 1992; cf. Barlow 1949; Carrasco 1999; Esquivias 2002; Urcid and Esquivias 2000).

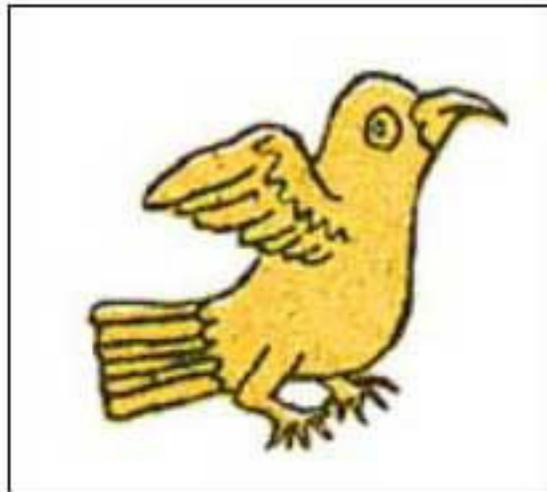


Figure 1. Topoglyph of Toztlan. (*Codex Mendoza*, [Berdan and Anawalt 1992]).

Totógal has escaped the attention of most scholars working in the southern Gulf Lowlands. Medel and Alvarado (1993) mentions a settlement on Totogaltepetl (Totógal hill)¹ that was the home of Santiago Tuxtla's indigenous population prior to early Colonial resettlement (see also Ortíz Ceballos 1975; Rivas Castellanos 1999). Blom and La Farge (1923:19-20) refer to ruins on the southern side of the "Santiago volcano" as the source of Postclassic-style monuments they observed in San Andrés Tuxtla. Likewise, Gerhard (1993) refers to Tuxtla's naturally fortified mountain position. This description certainly characterizes the location of Totógal, but Gerhard does not directly identify the site.

¹ The extinct volcano on the outskirts of Santiago Tuxtla is known more commonly as Cerro el Vigía. It is seen in some local histories or colonial maps of the region as Cerro de Tuxtla or Tuxtantepec (Rivas Castellanos 1999).

Site Description

Totógal is situated at approximately 300 m asl on the southeastern slopes of Cerro el Vigía, a dormant volcano immediately west of Santiago Tuxtla (Figure 2). The site is less than 2 km upslope from the small town of Sehualaca. Several looters' pits impact stone architecture at the site and the displacement of walls suggests that dynamite was used (Ponciano Ortiz, personal communication, 2004). Today the site is divided among four property owners.



Figure 2. Totógal, Sierra de los Tuxtlas and Papaloapan Basin.

Totógal extends 300 to 400 m from north to south, and roughly 1 km west to east (Figure 3). A promontory in the southeast corner of the site offers a commanding view of the Tepango (Tuxtla) river valley, which would have been advantageous if defense was a concern (Carrasco 1999; Gerhard 1993; Paso and Troncoso 1905).



Figure 3. Totógal as seen from promontory in southeast.

Steep slopes on the north, east, and south sides, and uneven, volcanic surfaces at the western fringes of the site served as natural limits to site growth. Artifact distributions suggest this, as does the far western terrain, which is punctuated by two volcanic cones. Nearly all portions of the site are within 150 m of year-round water sources, though water availability may have differed in the past, before deforestation of the area.

Visible architecture includes earthen mounds, stone foundation walls and altered natural landforms ([Figure 4](#)). Construction and landform modifications are dispersed across the site but with some localized clustering in the west, center, north and east. The named zones roughly correspond to property divisions so that Field A = the western "Itzcuintli Complex"; Field B = the central "Muros Zone"; Field C North = the northern "Arroyo Complex"; and Field C South = the eastern "Terraza Zone". Field D has low artifact densities and contains no architecture.

A four-meter high conical mound dominates the "Itzcuintli" complex ([Figure 5](#)). A long mound lies twenty meters to its immediate north and measures approximately 60 m from west to east and 20 m from north to south. This was a natural terrace and its slopes were reinforced by basalt retaining walls, particularly on the north side, which drops suddenly to an arroyo 30 m below. Another modified landform sits approximately 50 m to the west of the conical mound. It has stone reinforced walls and its top has been leveled. These retaining walls prevent erosion into a tree-filled gully to the south.

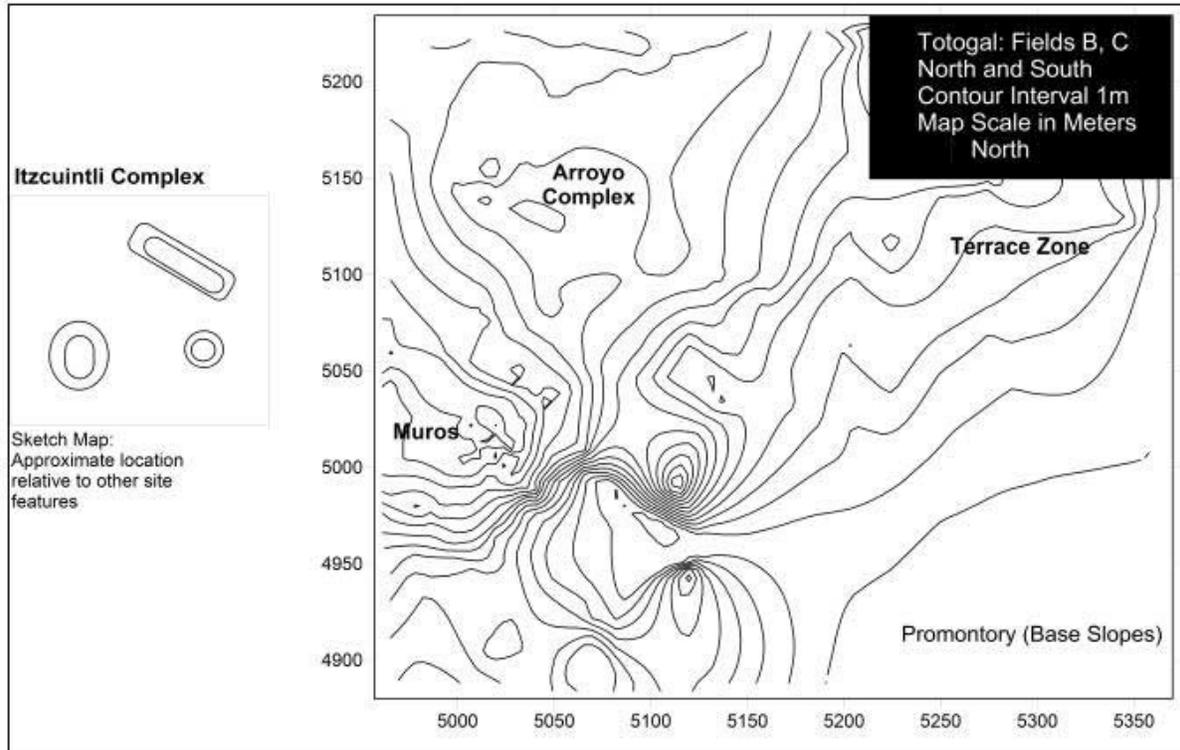


Figure 4. Topographic Map of Totógal (Field D not shown).



Figure 5. Field A (Itzcuintli Complex), looking west from Muros.

A natural spur begins 75 m east of the Itzcuintli complex and forms the central "Muros" zone. This natural feature has been reinforced on its north, east and south slopes. It also functions as a platform for multi-roomed stone structures. Only the most recent construction phase is easily observed ([Figure](#)

6). This later building phase used a different technique of construction from the underlying foundations: porous basalt blocks adhered with sand, clay, and shell mortar. The lower structure was made with less porous dry-laid basalt cobbles and small boulders (Figure 7). The lower structure sits directly on the tepetate, or volcanic substratum, which was reached at approximately 65 cm below ground surface.



Figure 6. Mortared Walls on Main Platform (Muros Zone).



Figure 7. Operation 3, Dry-laid wall sitting on tepetate.

Four looters' pits are located on the platform. The cleaning of profiles in two of these pits yielded several elaborately decorated ceramics ([Figure 8](#)), but surprisingly, no colonial materials². Substantial wall fall confuses the architectural pattern, but conductivity over this area provides a rough blueprint of the extensive construction ([Figure 9](#)). A low rise sits south of the platform and yielded high densities of materials. Approximately 20 m farther east there is a small volcanic cone. Its leveled top and artifacts near its base suggest that it was utilized.

A series of artifact concentrations lie to the northeast of the Muros Zone. They sit on relatively level terrain, which terminates in a series of terraces in the east. No mounds or landform modifications are located here, but we recovered high densities of daub and a few buried rock alignments that, together with artifact distributions, suggest a residential function for the area. A permanent stream that flows from west to east provides the northern border for this locale.

To the north of the arroyo sits the small "Arroyo" mound complex. The small 3 m high conical mound in this area is artificial. Another low rise sits approximately 10 m to the east-southeast. This feature is less than a meter high and the density of materials recovered on it is high.

The eastern slopes of the site, the "Terraza" zone, are stepped and supported additional occupation. On the first terrace step and close to the northern arroyo, artifact densities are high; however, they appear to decline dramatically in the areas further down slope to the east and south. The slope overlooking the arroyo is retained artificially with small basalt boulders that may include steps that descend to the water.

² Local histories attribute this structure to Hernán Cortés (Medel and Alvarado 1993; Rivas Castellanos 1999).



Figure 8. Texcoco Molded Censer Fragment.

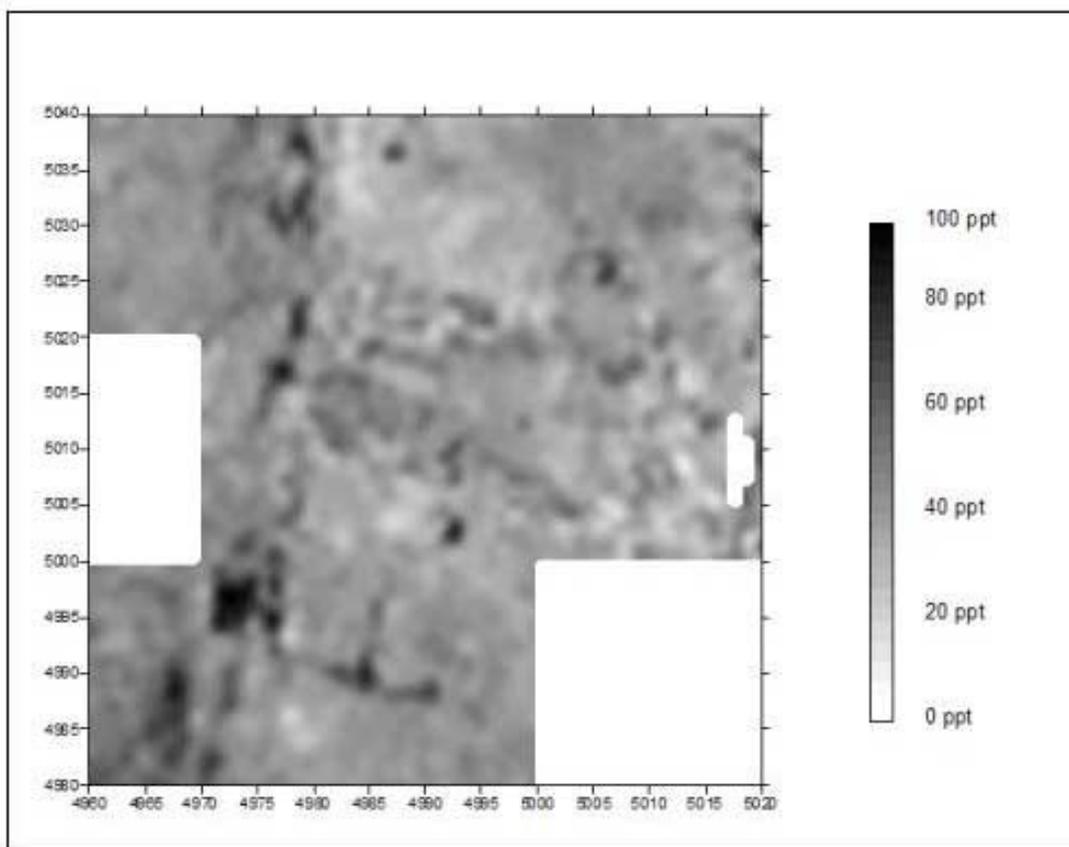


Figure 9. Muros Conductivity (Electromagnetic Induction) (Black areas correspond to foundation walls).

Fieldwork at Totógal

The goal of the 2004 field season was four-fold: (1) to undertake a systematic survey of Totógal; (2) to complement this with remote-sensing in areas with high densities of artifacts or architectural remains; (3) to conduct stratigraphically controlled excavations; and (4) to document the sequence of architectural construction phases through trenching and the cleaning of existing looter's pits. We had to alter our initial surface collection strategy that required sod removal from 3x3 m units. To accommodate landowner concerns we adopted a shovel-testing program where our probes measured 30 cm sq and 20 cm deep, the INAH-prescribed depth to still be considered surface (Arqlogos Ma. del Carmen Rodríguez and Jaime Cortés, Centro INAH Veracruz, personal communication, 2004). To compensate for the decrease in surface area, we reduced the spacing between collections to intervals of 25 m in both directions. After initial shovel-testing, we returned to areas where artifact densities were high or that contained evidence of foreign (i.e. Aztec-style) material. Here we placed shovel-probes at intermediate distances between existing transects to better define the limits of concentrations.

We carried out an electro-magnetic induction survey (EM) in three areas. One block was placed at the western fringe of the site near the property line that divides Fields A and D. Shovel-testing in this area yielded two mold fragments for the production of Texcoco-Molded censers. EM detected a circular anomaly that we thought might represent a kiln. However, when shovel tests were dug at closely spaced intervals over the anomaly, no additional artifacts or production debris were found. A second block was surveyed in the northeastern corner of the site because of observed terrace modification, foreign-style ceramics and Postclassic figurines³, several pieces of green Pachuca obsidian, and two triangular projectile points, one made from green obsidian, the other from clear source material. We identified several angular anomalies, but no clear architectural patterns were observed. No additional ground-truthing was conducted in this area due to constraints on this season's excavation permit and time. The third block was located on the main platform. The constructions encountered were described above.

We conducted excavations in eight locations, placed two trenches near architectural features, and cleaned wall profiles of two large looter's pits. From these operations, we obtained and submitted several radiocarbon samples for assay: the results confirm continuous occupation from the Middle Classic through the Late Postclassic.

Despite INAH and alcalde support, we were never permitted to systematically study Field A. However, we were permitted to collect samples from the north slope of the long mound and the adjacent bottom areas that were not vegetated. In this surface collection, we used a modified version of the initially planned strategy and collected from 3x3 m units spaced at 25 m. One unit had an especially high density of materials so we collected one adjacent 3x3 m square to better define the concentration. In addition, one family living in Field A provided us access to materials within their house lot. They live at the western edge of the long mound/terrace.

³ Ohnerson notes that similar figurines were used in central highland domestic rituals during the Postclassic (2001).

Artifacts

Fieldwork at Totógal recovered approximately 27,000 ceramic sherds, 458 flaked-stone artifacts, and 11,912 grams of burned clay fragments from systematic shovel-tests, opportunistic surface collections, and excavations. Shovel-testing recovered 172 flaked-stone artifacts; 8556 ceramic sherds; and 3033.8 grams of burned clay, 573 grams of which contain diagnostic architectural characteristics.

We recovered materials from nearly all parts of Totógal except at the peripheries where declining artifact frequencies within shovel-tests were used to determine the approximate limits of the site⁴. Places with architectural features yielded the greatest quantities of artifacts; as noted above, however, the types of architectural units vary. Excavations placed in surface artifact concentrations or near architectural features yielded the remainder of materials. Most deposits were one meter or less in depth. Only those in the Arroyo Complex were deeper. Preliminary analysis of materials supports a Late Postclassic (A.D. 1350-1521) date for Totógal's principle occupation even though we found earlier materials and there is substantial continuity in ceramic pastes from the Classic period.

Ceramics

All encountered ceramics (rims and body sherds) were collected. Few Formative period diagnostics were identified. The Formative period occupation appears to have been small and disperse with Formative ceramics found in both Fields A and B. A more systematic study of Field A in the future will better define the early occupation.

Some Classic period Fine Gray (untempered) bowl forms were recovered. We also found a few examples of Coarse Orange, a Tuxtlas ware that carried over from the Classic into the Early Postclassic period (Arnold and Venter 2005). Untempered Fine Orange ceramics, previously thought to occur in highest proportions during the Middle Classic period (Santley and Arnold 1996), are often decorated with Late Postclassic motifs at Totógal. Common designs include step-frets and triangles etched into a black painted rim band like those on Tres Picos II pottery in the central Gulf Lowlands (Medellin Zenil 1960:155; see also Arnold 2003: Figure 7). At least 31% of all decorated ceramics contain motifs characteristic of this tradition. Ongoing motif analysis may increase this percentage. Continued study of Totógal's ceramic decoration and vessel forms will better distinguish temporal phases. Because most Late Postclassic decoration is on untempered pastes similar to Classic period wares, motif styles and vessel forms will likely prove the best tools to discriminate chronological patterns.

In addition to Gulf Lowland styles, we recovered several fragments of Texcoco-Molded censers and molds, thought to be a marker of Aztec imperialism (Garraty and Stark 2002; Ohnorsorgen 2001; Umberger 1996) (see [Figure 8](#)). Their distribution is ubiquitous, but quantities vary by location. Ceramics of this type make up 10% of all decorated sherds and are usually of a fine to medium sand-tempered brown to orange paste. Combined, Texcoco-Molded and Tres Picos II-style pottery account for at least 41% of all decorated ceramics at Totógal. The proportions of these decorative styles suggest that a significant proportion of the occupation at Totógal belongs to the Late Postclassic.

⁴ My use of the term periphery to describe the edges of the site does not mean that artifact densities were greater in a so-called core and gradually decreased to nothing. If speaking in terms of cores and peripheries, then there were multiple cores at Totógal: these correspond to the above-mentioned clusters and zones.

While elaborately decorated ceramics are ubiquitous, two areas in particular yielded higher proportions; the main platform in the Muros Zone and the Arroyo Complex. Some of the best examples of Tres Picos II-style pottery were encountered during our cleaning and profiling of looters' pits. Likewise, the surface of the buried wall ([Figure 7](#)) mentioned above yielded this ceramic style and Texcoco-Molded pottery, suggesting that this architectural feature was used during the Late Postclassic. We have not identified Classic or Early to Middle Postclassic period diagnostics from on top of these walls.



Figure 10. Trench 1, North Wall Profile, N5145 E5025, trench placed at east toe of mound.

In the other area that yielded especially high proportions of Late Postclassic diagnostic ceramics, the Arroyo complex, we placed two excavation units and a trench. The 1x2 m (west to east, 2 m deep) trench, placed at the eastern foot of the small conical mound, yielded nearly 3000 pieces of pottery, 40 pieces (25.3 grams) of obsidian (green=19 [14.1g], clear/clear w/inclusions=7 [2.8 g], black/dark gray=14 [8.4 g], other=1 [.1 g]), a roller stamp⁵ and a spindle whorl ([Figure 10](#)). Preliminary analysis of materials from this mound suggests Late Postclassic construction and occupation: diagnostic Late Postclassic ceramics, Aztec imperial-style Texcoco-Molded censer fragments and Late Postclassic Gulf Lowland decorated ceramics (e.g. Tres Picos II-style [Figure 11](#)), occur in the plow zone as well as the six strata identified during excavation. These decorated sherds are found in mixed deposits that contain Postclassic and Classic period ceramics: wares include Fine Orange, Fine Gray, and Coarse Orange. The Tres Picos II-style and Texcoco-Molded sherds in each stratum suggest Late Postclassic mound construction, but the fill used may incorporate ceramics from earlier occupations.

⁵ Several additional stamps are in private collections of previous landowners. These collections, also included complete ceramic vessels, figurine molds, and figurines, some of which are reminiscent of the Classic period in the nearby Mixtequilla. We were permitted to view these collections during the field season. We hope to return to conduct a photo inventory.

Because this is an enclosed, low-lying, flood prone area, it may have been desirable to create raised surfaces. The amount of alluvial fill in an excavation unit to the immediate southeast of this mound supports this explanation. That unit yielded deeply buried Late Postclassic ceramics that had been covered by a thick layer of nearly sterile alluvium. It appears as though the Late Postclassic occupants of the area initially settled closer to the arroyo then moved northward away from it where they used surrounding fill to construct the mound.

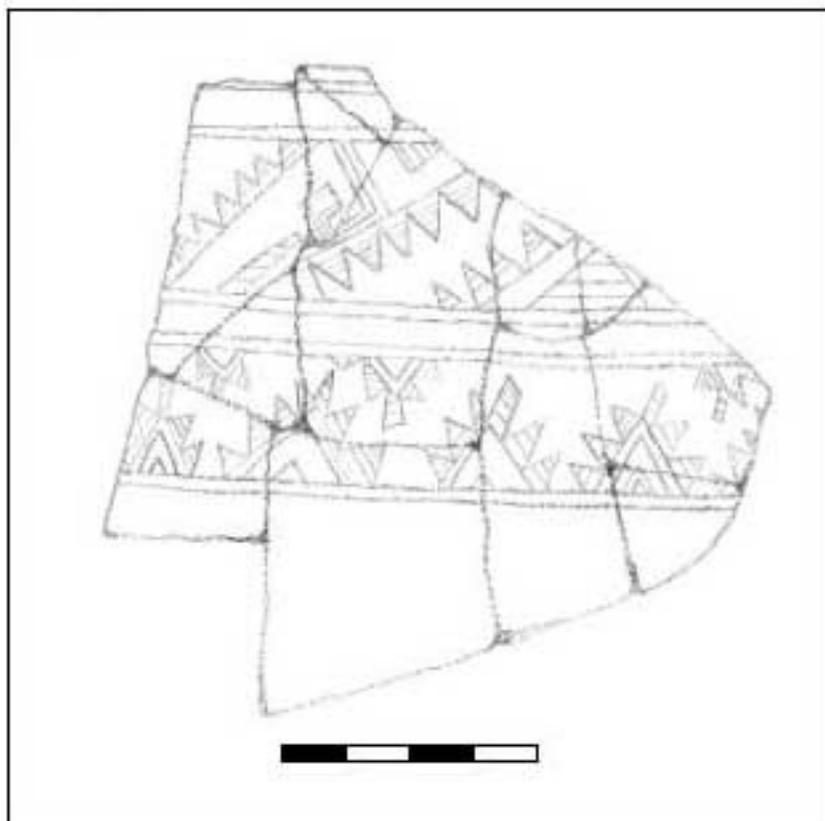


Figure 11. Tres Picos II-Style Bowl (scale in cm).

Obsidian

All flaked-stone artifacts at Totógal were made from obsidian (Table 1). Prior Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis conducted on obsidian at other Gulf Lowland sites shows a strong correlation between visual color categories and source material so that green corresponds to Pachuca, clear/light gray to Pico de Orizaba⁶, and black/dark gray correlates to Zaragoza-Oyameles (Heller and Stark 1998; Santley et al. 1991; Stark et al. 1992). Survey and excavation recovered production indicators as well as finished prismatic blades and projectile points. Production debris includes macrodebitage and core fragments of both green and black obsidian. Production debris and

⁶ Guadalupe Victoria obsidian is located near the Pico de Orizaba (PDO) source. It is a similar color as PDO, but it has more inclusions and may not have been preferred for prismatic blade production. We initially identified obsidian listed as "probable Pico de Orizaba" as Guadalupe Victoria. However, because of the presence of prismatic blades made from this latter source material and the unexpectedly low frequency of Pico de Orizaba material at Totógal, I combined the two source categories in some calculations throughout this report.

prismatic blade fragments are both found in the various parts of the site. While no strong clustering occurs in surface collections based on source consumption, counts vary. Green obsidian has the most extensive distribution and is present in portions of the site where frequencies of other sources are lower. The lower frequency or absence of non-green material is likely related to the extent of occupation during different temporal phases and not to differential access within the site.

Table 1 Obsidian Summary Data					
Source (source code)	Number	Weight	% of Total by #	% of Total by gr.	Avg. grams/item
Pico de Orizaba (1)	60	39.7	13.10%	10.20%	0.66
Probable Pico de Orizaba (4)	51	54.1	11.10%	13.90%	1.06
<i>Combined PdOrizaba & Probable PdO (1+4)</i>					
	111	93.8	24.20%	24.10%	0.85
Pachuca (2)	184	189.1	40.20%	48.60%	1.03
Zaragoza Oyameles (3)	144	96.6	31.40%	24.80%	0.67
Probable Zaragoza-Oyameles (5)	12	6.1	2.60%	1.60%	0.51
<i>Combined Zar-Oy & Probable Zar-Oy (3+5)</i>					
	166	102.7	34.00%	26.40%	0.62
Other/UnID'd (6)	7	3.4	1.50%	0.90%	0.49
Total	458	389	100.00%	100.00%	0.74

Average weight per specimen varies dramatically by source. As Table 1 indicates, the average weight per item for clear and black/dark gray (including probable Zaragoza-Oyameles) obsidian is substantially lower than the ratio for green obsidian and material that may source to Pico de Orizaba (source code 4, Guadalupe Victoria). All categories contain both prismatic blades and production debris so differences there should not be cause for this pattern. Likewise, we recovered core fragments of both black and green obsidian (both of whose weights skew the mean upward), equalizing the effects of outliers on these ratios. Blade size may relate to smaller core size for positively identified Pico de Orizaba obsidian (Heller and Stark 1998:125). Larger size for blades and debitage of probable Pico de Orizaba material may reflect a temporal difference in source access,

core size or the unlikely possibility that this material is not from Pico de Orizaba. For black obsidian, low comparative weight per specimen is uncharacteristic: this could mean breakage rates were higher and imply functional differences. More in-depth analysis will clarify this.

The obsidian data at Totógal are mostly characteristic of Postclassic trends elsewhere in the Gulf Lowlands (Arnold 2003; Arnold and Venter 2005; Heller and Stark 1998; Ohnersorgen 2001); however there are a few striking differences. Compared to Isla Agaltepec, which has roughly 60% clear obsidian, the proportion at Totógal is much lower at 24.2% (24% by weight). The amount of clear obsidian is also low in comparison to central Gulf Lowland Postclassic sites (Heller and Stark 1998). In contrast to several Gulf Lowland sites, the proportion of green obsidian at Totógal is substantially higher at 40% (49% by weight), even higher than Cotaxtla, an Aztec provincial capital that was closer to the Central Highlands ([20-30%] Ohnersorgen 2001). The proportion of green obsidian at Totógal is more like Late Postclassic sites in the Mixtequilla where Pachuca material comprised roughly 43% of collections (Stark 1990:269). The high proportion of black/dark gray obsidian ([count = 34%], [weight in grams = 26.4%]), suggests a substantial Classic period occupation.

A technological trend observed at Gulf Lowland Postclassic sites (Arnold 2003; Arnold and Venter 2005; Heller and Stark 1998) is the grinding of platforms. We recorded 74 platforms at Totógal: 40 are ground (Table 2). Platform grinding is differently associated with artifact type and material source. Most platforms are on finished prismatic blades, but some are from core reduction debris. All green and clear platforms are ground, while most black platforms are not. Platform treatment and its correlation with source material suggest that Classic and Early Postclassic period occupations preceded the Late Postclassic at Totógal. The clear obsidian and clear ground platforms suggest a Postclassic date, but it is uncertain if the material was associated with an earlier Postclassic population or with the Late Postclassic. At Isla Agaltepec, the highest proportions of clear obsidian are from Early Postclassic contexts (Arnold 2003). At Totógal, the fact that both ground and unground platforms occur nearly equally on both clear obsidian and clear obsidian with inclusions may reflect the transition from Classic to Early Postclassic technologies and source utilization. Population decreases during the early portions of the Postclassic have been noted for other parts of the Tuxtlas (Killion and Urcid 2001; Santley and Arnold 1996) and this trend may be reflected at the site by the lower-than-expected amount of clear obsidian. Nevertheless, there is only a slight decline in clear obsidian compared to black material, suggesting at relative stability during the Classic-to-Postclassic transition, unlike other sites in the Tuxtlas (Santley and Arnold 1996).

Table 2					
Polished Platforms			Unpolished Platforms		
Source	#	% of Total	Source	#	% of Total
Pico de Orizaba	5	12.50%	Pico de Orizaba	0	0.00%
Probable Pico de Orizaba	6	15.00%	Probable Pico de Orizaba	4	11.80%
<i>Combined PdO & Probable PdO</i>					
	11	17.00%		4	11.80%
Pachuca	22	55.00%	Pachuca	0	0.00%
Zaragoza-Oyameles	4	10.00%	Zaragoza-Oyameles	30	88.20%
Probable Zar-Oy	2	5.00%	Probable Zar-Oy	0	0.00%
<i>Combined Zar-Oy & Probable Zar-Oy</i>					
	6	15.00%		30	88.20%
Indeterminate	1	2.50%	Indeterminate	0	0.00%
Total					
	40	100.00%		34	100.00%
Total Platforms			#		
			% of Total		
Polished			40		
			54.10%		
Unpolished			34		
			45.90%		
Total Platforms			74		
			100.00%		

Although the ways regional population trends affected Totógal remain to be fully explained, by the Late Postclassic it appears there was population growth at the site. While we should not assume that the Late Postclassic inhabitants did not use black obsidian or that green obsidian was not used during the Classic period, platform grinding and a lower-than-expected proportion of clear obsidian suggest that the Late Postclassic occupants used green obsidian almost exclusively, especially if we

allow for an earlier Postclassic occupation that imported clear obsidian. That Totógal was not importing the closer clear Pico de Orizaba obsidian to the same extent as its Late Postclassic Gulf Lowland contemporaries suggests that the site's occupants had different access to central highlands exchange networks and relied heavily on them to supply this material. A reliance on central highland obsidian could relate to Toztlan's ethnohistorically documented imperial connections that may have made the community reliant on its obsidian exchange networks. The high proportion of green obsidian could also relate to Toztlan's proximity to isthmian trade corridors, which imperial pochteca merchants likely traversed (Carrasco 1999). Other Gulf Lowland sites with documented imperial ties showed a marked increase in green Pachuca source material during the Late Postclassic (Heller and Stark 1998; Ohnersorgen 2001). These obsidian data, together with imported ceramic decoration styles, suggest that fairly direct and frequent interactions characterized Totógal/Aztec relations.

Summary and Conclusions

Archaeological data suggest that the principle occupation of Totógal dates to the Late Postclassic period. The Late Postclassic settlement was preceded by small Formative, and moderate Classic, and Early Postclassic components. The size of the Classic occupation is uncertain due to considerable ceramic paste continuity, however, if the amounts of black/dark gray obsidian coupled with non-ground platforms are compared to amounts of green obsidian and ground platforms, the population was only slightly smaller than the Late Postclassic period one. The distribution of settlement for both occupations is similar in that most areas of the site contain Classic and Late Postclassic artifacts, but more construction appears to have occurred later and decorative elements on ceramics are mostly Late Postclassic. The obsidian data suggests an Early and/or Middle Postclassic occupation, and while it appears to have been roughly comparable in size to the Classic period population, it was smaller than earlier but especially later phases.

Ceramic pastes and decorative traditions show that the inhabitants of Totógal had ties to the Tuxtlas, the central Gulf Lowlands, and the expanding Aztec empire. Gulf Lowland and Tuxtlas ceramic pastes and decorations dominate the Totógal assemblage and flat, mold-made figurines may reflect a general Postclassic figurine technology change (Miller personal communication, 2005). Imperial-style ceramics represent fewer than 15% of decorated materials. Nevertheless, the foreign styles, including Texcoco-Molded censers, speak volumes. Texcoco-Molded pottery is a rare type in the Gulf Lowlands as well as in the Basin of Mexico except at Otumba. The fact that Totógal used and produced this ceremonial form is significant in that it represents efforts to reproduce Aztec ritual practices or symbolism at the site.

In summary, several lines of evidence suggest that Totógal participated in both Late Postclassic Gulf Lowland and Aztec imperial economical and political networks, as well as technological and stylistic traditions, these include: (1) imperial-style ceramics; (2) Gulf Lowland-style ceramic decoration; (3) Tuxtlas ceramic paste traditions; (4) green obsidian; and, (5) obsidian platform grinding.

Ethnohistoric evidence places Toztlan at the frontier of the expanding Aztec Empire (Berdan and Anawalt 1992; Carrasco 1999; Esquivias 2002; Gerhard 1993; Paso and Troncoso 1905; Urcid and Esquivias 2000). In anthropological studies of boundaries (e.g. Berdan 2003; Parker 2002), frontiers are increasingly conceived of as multidimensional zones of interaction in which various groups have different interests. The concerns of frontier actors may be economical, political, or cultural and may

overlap. Therefore, at any one point within a frontier, a kaleidoscope of perspectives may be represented.

Ethnohistory notes the presence of sub-populations at Toztlan, foreign and local, and suggests there were varied interests as well. The *Relación de Tuztla* (Paso and Troncoso 1905) reports that "the people of Toztlan had their own lord"; later "they gave themselves in friendship to Moteuczoma", who installed a calpixque as governor (see also Carrasco 1999:342). These different groups co-residing at Totógal may be the reason for both foreign and regional styles. However, there is no apparent spatial separation in their distribution suggesting at some degree of intra-community acceptance of the others' traditions and materials.

Paso and Troncoso (1905) also notes that Toztlan frequently fought battles with various groups from neighboring independent Coatzacoalcos, and that Toztlan was one of the towns that signaled the entrance to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and its trade corridors (Carrasco 1999:342). Frequent warfare between Toztlan and Coatzacoalcos may have worn on the former. For this reason, Toztlan may have agreed to "give themselves in friendship": this could have meant that they would pay tribute to the Aztecs by way of the Tochtepec province (Codex Mendoza, Berdan and Anawalt 1992) in return for protection and perhaps a steady supply of green Pachuca obsidian. Whether it was to monitor the payment of tribute or the geo-political situation with Coatzacoalcos, an imperial presence was installed and some degree of direct imperial administration may have been tolerated. This notion, while tentative, is supported by the ubiquitous distribution of imperial ceremonial symbols, such as Texcoco-Molded censers, regional ceramic traditions such as Tres Picos II designs, and green obsidian at Totógal. In the absence of a physical imperial presence at Totógal, the adoption of imperial-style ceremonial devices suggests that, nonetheless, the community attempted to associate themselves with the Aztec Triple Alliance by way of shared styles on ceremonial paraphernalia.

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