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Ritual Diversity and Social Identities: A Study of Mortuary Behaviors at Teotihuacán, México



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Culture: Teotihuacán
Chronology: Early Classic
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Site: Teotihuacán

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Abstract

In this report I present preliminary findings from a detailed investigation of mortuary practices at urban and hinterland sites associated with the ancient state of Teotihuacán. This research is aimed at developing a better understanding of social identity and diversity within Teotihuacán society. Most of Teotihuacán's urban population lived in apartment compounds across the city, but the nature of the social units that occupied separate residential locales is not well understood. Even less is known about how subordinate settlements beyond the city limits were socially organized and to what degree they were integrated into urban Teotihuacán society. While significant research has addressed economic variation at Teotihuacán, there is a relative shortage of research on ideational variation and its role in structuring social organization. Since ritual practices surely contributed to the daily negotiation of social identities that related to gender, age, and religion, they are an important focus of archaeological research. This FAMSI-supported project entails a comprehensive investigation of previously excavated materials from mortuary contexts at Teotihuacán, toward understanding ritual variability. Preliminary results indicate that significant differences existed among separate residential areas at Teotihuacán. This suggests that Teotihuacán was a ritually and socially diverse society, and that social groups are likely to have been delineated partly on the basis of ritual practices.

Resumen

Este informe presenta los resultados preliminares de una investigación que se enfoca a la identidad social en la ciudad antigua de Teotihuacán, México, por medio de un análisis de los datos mortuorios. La mayoría de la población Teotihuacana vivía en los conjuntos arquitectónicos situados en toda la ciudad, pero la naturaleza de las unidades sociales que ocuparon dichos conjuntos no está bien entendida. Aún menos se sabe cómo asentamientos rurales subordinados estaban integrados a la sociedad Teotihuacana. Mientras que las investigaciones anteriores han tratado la variación económica entre los conjuntos, poco se ha hecho para comprender las diferencias ideológicas que contribuyeron a la negociación diaria de las identidades sociales relacionadas con el género, la edad, y la religión. Este proyecto implica una investigación comprensiva de los materiales previamente excavados en contextos mortuorios en Teotihuacán y en un centro regional contemporáneo. Los resultados preliminares indican que existieron diferencias significativas entre áreas residenciales en Teotihuacán. Esto sugiere que Teotihuacán era una sociedad ritualmente y socialmente diversa, y que grupos sociales fueron delineados en parte en base a prácticas rituales.

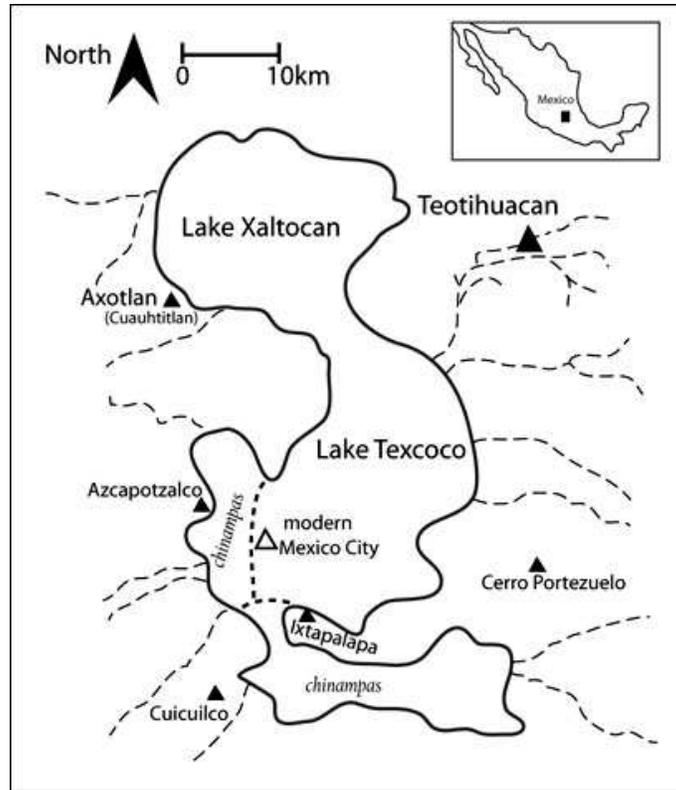


Figure 1. Basin of México map showing Classic period sites.

Introduction

Teotihuacán, located about 45 kilometers northeast of modern México City (Figure 1), was a densely populated metropolis that thrived from the first century B.C. to A.D. 550/650. Millon (1973) has estimated that approximately 125,000 residents occupied the city at its height, after A.D. 200. As one of the largest and earliest urban centers in the Americas, Teotihuacán has attracted the attention of archaeologists as well as the general public. Its most conspicuous enigmas include its rapid population growth and development as an early primate center and regional power, its long term success as a state, and the reasons for its ultimate political dissolution. Teotihuacán's population lived in some 2000 apartment compounds located throughout the city, but the nature of the social units that occupied these compounds is not clear. Even less is known about settlements on the fringes of the city or elsewhere in the Basin of México, in terms of their social organization and connectedness with Teotihuacán's urban population. Research on settlement, craft production and economy, paleodemography, long-distance interactions, and elite ritual and worldview has generated a clearer picture of Teotihuacán state and society. Nevertheless, there is much to be learned about what daily life was like for ordinary members of Teotihuacán's population, which comprised a rich mosaic of social, occupational, and ethnic diversity. In this report I present preliminary findings from a continuing research project focused on identity and social organization, through a

comparative investigation of mortuary practices at four distinct Teotihuacán settlements.

This research was prompted by broader questions about the nature of Teotihuacán society as a whole and the social groups that it included. Archaeologists recognize that Teotihuacán was a multiethnic city whose growth was based on immigration from its very beginnings (Parsons 1976:86-89). Multiple lines of evidence demonstrate that foreigners constituted a portion of the city's population throughout its history (Spence and Gamboa 1999; Spence 2002; White et al. 2004). Although this ethnic and economic diversity has been firmly established, domestic ritual has often been treated as somewhat homogeneous across the population. That is, while obvious differences in ritual practice are discussed at the foreign barrios as a point of contrast, there may be an implicit notion of the otherwise "typical" Teotihuacano. In my research I problematize the notion that Teotihuacanos, while economically and socially stratified, were relatively homogeneous in their ritual practices and associated belief systems. Ritual practices may have been integral to maintaining social cohesion among subsets of Teotihuacán's populations, and likely communicated and constructed social boundaries as well. Consequently, research on ritual variation is highly important for developing an understanding of social variation at Teotihuacán. A central question is whether Teotihuacanos generally practiced a common set of ritual behaviors. Was there, for example, a normative mortuary program at Teotihuacán? What role did ritual practices serve in delineating social groups and institutions at Teotihuacán, and was it a factor in residential organization across the city? Millon (1973) has suggested that residents of single compounds or clusters of compounds (neighborhoods) may have shared religious practices. Findings from this FAMSI-supported research project support this idea.

My research addresses the question of whether social groups at Teotihuacán were differentiated based on ritual practices, which surely contributed to the daily negotiation of social identities that related to gender, age, ethnicity, and religion. Secondly, I consider the scale of such social groups, and whether they correlate with the residential organization of the state into compounds and neighborhoods. Large-scale social groups, whose distinctions were likely expressed in ritual practice, may have either mapped onto particular spatial districts or cross-cut these areas.

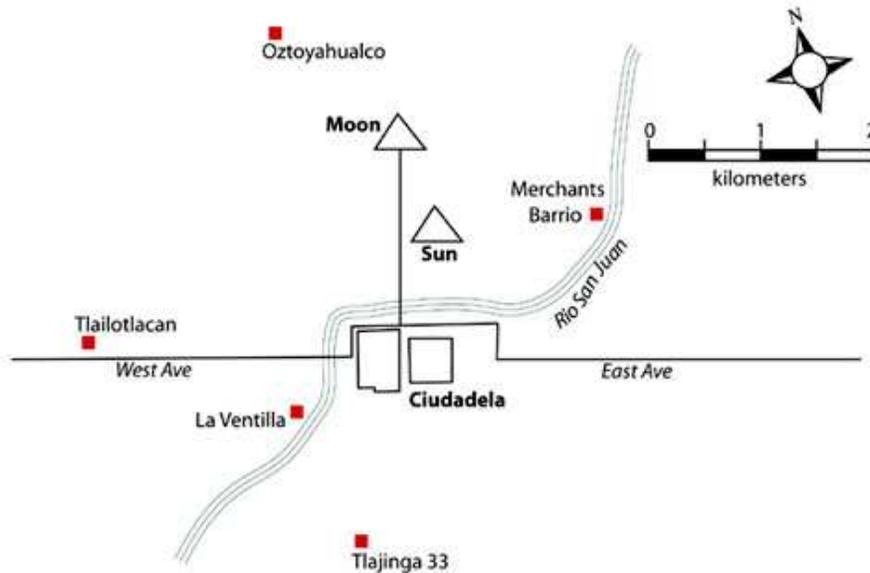


Figure 2. Teotihuacán map showing several residential locales.

To address this problem, I conducted a detailed, comparative investigation of mortuary practices at four different residential areas, which have been extensively excavated and represent both urban and hinterland components of the state. The sites are located in different areas of Teotihuacán (Figure 2) and were selected because of their excellent potential for demonstrating the range of variability across the social landscape. They include the neighborhoods of La Ventilla (Gómez C. 2000), Tlailotlacan (Spence and Gamboa C. 1999), and Tlajinga 33 (Storey and Widmer 1989), as well as a contemporary center called Axotlan. Located in Cuauhtitlan Izcalli, about 35 kilometers to the west, Axotlan was excavated by Instituto Nacional de Arqueología e Historia (INAH) archaeologist Raúl García C. (2004). While most previous research on Teotihuacán has focused on its urban component, the state must be understood as comprising hinterland settlements as well as a centrally located, urban population. I incorporate burials from both into this study because I believe that a regional perspective is necessary for developing a fuller understanding of Teotihuacán social organization.

Data, Method, and Theory

My research draws upon anthropological theory that supports a relationship between the treatment of individuals at death and their social identities during life (Binford 1971, Saxe 1970). Rather than viewing burials as direct material reflections of the hierarchical structures of societies as Binford proposed, however, I view mortuary practices as active ritual contexts. During mortuary rites agents act, under social constraints, to reproduce, manipulate, and contest their positions in the social world, and in the context of these actions social identities

are negotiated and expressed. By social identities, I mean the ways which individuals are situationally conceived of, by themselves and others, as members of particular social groups. These groups may be characterized by such concepts as lineage, occupation, ethnicity, age, and gender. Any individual should be understood as negotiating multiple identities in the context of his or her daily activities and interactions. Gell (1998:137) has referred to the ‘fractal person,’ a concept wherein individuals are enmeshed in a series of networks with other individuals: partners, family members, friends, community, state, and so on. I find this concept useful as a framework for seeing social identities as constituted in the interactions that occur along these networks, and for emphasizing the relational and dynamic nature of identity. My research contributes to understanding the social identities that characterized groups at different scales in Teotihuacán society in the context of ritual behaviors. Results will enrich existing ideas about relative socioeconomic status by considering how status correlated with other aspects of social identity, including gender, age, and ethnicity.

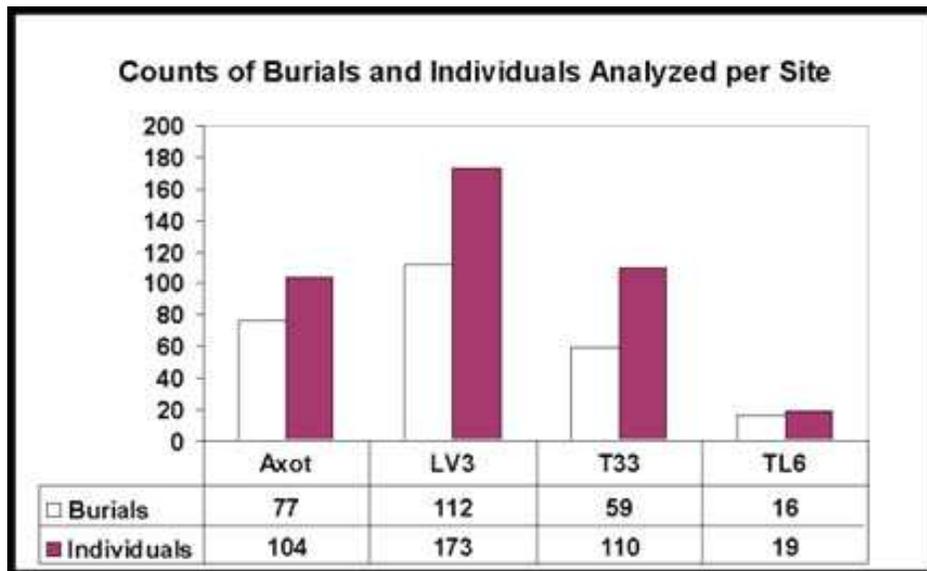


Figure 3. Burial and individual counts from each site.

In all, 264 burials were analyzed, including 406 individuals ([Figure 3](#)). Burials in this study correspond to the Early Tlamimilolpa phase through the Metepec phase, which represent Teotihuacán from its apex to its ultimate collapse as a state ([Figure 4](#)).

Mesoamerican Chronology	Teotihuacán Valley Phases	
Late Classic Period (A.D. 600 to 900)	Coyotlatelco	A.D. 650-850
	Metepec	A.D. 550-650
Early Classic Period (A.D. 250 to 600)	Late Xolalpan	A.D. 450-550
	Early	A.D. 350-450
	Late Tlamimilolpa	A.D. 275-350
	Early	A.D. 200-275
Late and Terminal Preclassic (300 B.C. to A.D. 250)	Miccaotli	A.D. 125-200
	Tzacualli	A.D. 1-125
	Patlachique	100-1 B.C.

Figure 4. Teotihuacán Chronology

Importantly, most burials excavated so far at Teotihuacán are from apartment compound contexts, the majority of which were constructed in Early Tlamimilolpa and continued to be the primary form of residence throughout history of the Teotihuacán state. Data from burials from these phases are, therefore, useful for examining changes in social identity, such as growing ritual distinctions among residential units through time. Thus, research focused on these phases provides an opportunity to examine changes in social organization that may have been associated with the decline of state institutions. That is, tensions and conflicts may have arisen from a social environment that included increasing disparity in status and the availability of resources. Furthermore, the development of large-scale cohesive groups, or social factions, possibly contributed to the state's declining stability. Data in the context of the larger study are isolated by phase in order to investigate increasing or decreasing heterogeneity in ritual practices through time.

Data for this project were generated over five months in 2006 and 2007, and involved systematic, physical analyses of the materials associated with burial contexts from the four sites, including ceramics, lithics, and bodily adornments and treatments. Bioarchaeological data were incorporated, including the sex and age of the deceased and cultural modifications of the body, such as cranial deformation and dental mutilation. Data relating to the burial context were also recorded. This information includes the location of each burial with respect to architectural contexts and relative to other interments, position and orientation of the body, and placement of the offerings. I also consider the number of individuals interred in single contexts and whether they were primary or secondary. All data were entered into a database using Microsoft Access, and were structured into several separate, relational tables. These tables correspond to the most frequent material categories (ceramics, obsidian, and candeleros) and to variables concerning the burial context and the individuals. I include one of the Access forms in this report ([Figure 5](#)) as an example showing some of the variables recorded.

Microsoft Access - [CERAMIC MAIN]

File Edit View Insert Format Records Tools Window Help

Californiaian FB 10 B I U

Specimen ID TSIP Object ID

Burial Key Excavator Object ID

IndivKey Spec Catalog #

Completeness support loc Wall thick (mm)

Ware support type Rim diam (cm)

Form handle loc Base diam (cm)

Ext Finish handle type Tot Height (cm)

Int Finish Neck Ht (cm)

Coarseness Body Ht (cm)

Dominant Color

Plain pinched spec r/n polychrome plano-relief

wet incised finger-impress mono red postfire poly striated

dry incised appliqued spec mono red yellow pigment pattern-pol

stamped plastic-modeled paint-zon-incis negative resist zone-pol

reed-impress red/nat spec paint-zon-incis fluting graffiti

motif present molded part

Rim form Quality Rating

Lip form Use/repair?

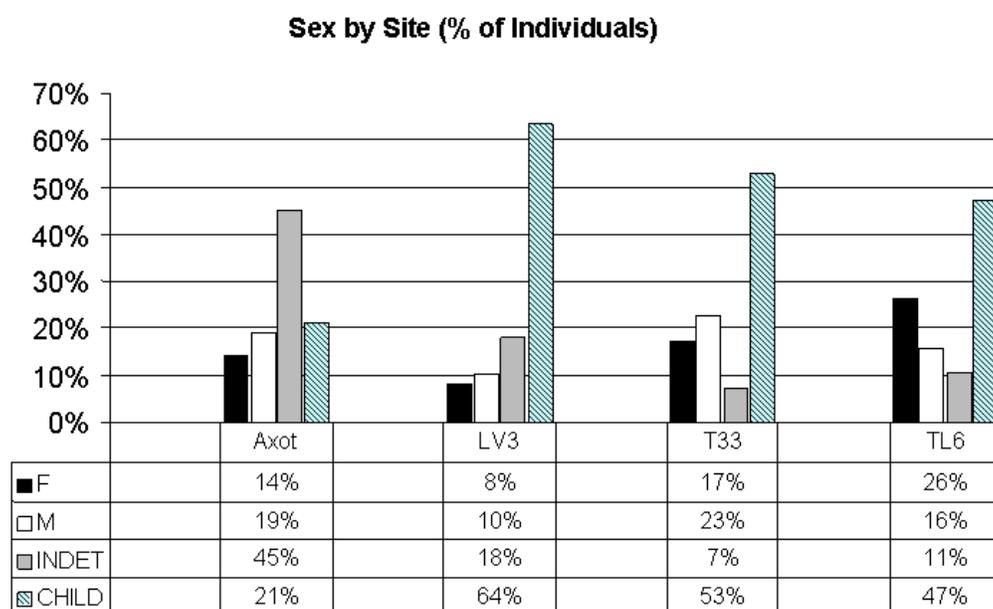
SCC Phase Part of Set?

ExcavPhase Arrangement

Record: 1 of 2

Figure 5. Ceramic Vessel Data Form.

The amount of data generated for this project is immense, and multivariate analyses are likely to reveal variability that is not immediately clear from the macroscopic observations. Since these analyses are not yet completed, the interpretations presented here must be considered preliminary. However, some readily observable differences in the material culture associated with mortuary contexts already indicate that a significant degree of ritual diversity existed among the residential areas. In this report, I introduce several objectives of the larger, FAMSI-supported research project. I focus this discussion on some of the major differences observed in mortuary practices among the sites considered, and their implications.



Numbers of Individuals by Sex at each Site:

SITE	F	M	INDET	CHILD	TOT
Axotlan	15	20	47	22	104
La Ventilla 3	14	18	31	110	173
Tlajinga 33	19	25	8	58	110
Tlailotlacan 6	5	3	2	9	19

Figure 6. Sex by Site.

The majority of skeletons from the Teotihuacán locales included in this study have previously been sexed and aged in the context of their respective projects. [Figure 6](#) provides a breakdown of sex for each of the sites, and shows that male

and female adults are relatively evenly represented. The “Indeterminate” category applies to adults that could not be sexed due to issues of poor preservation, and the “Unknown” category applies to children. Burials inside Teotihuacán’s compounds are not numerous enough to be considered representative of the entire population that occupied these architectural units throughout their histories. However, the fact that the sexes are fairly evenly distributed within the compounds supports the hypothesis that the compounds represent kin-groups, rather than some other subset of society. Furthermore, even representation of the sexes facilitates an investigation of gendered differences in mortuary practices associated with particular residential areas. This makes it possible to consider the intersection of gender as a facet of social identity, with other aspects of the social persona (Goodenough 1965). I do not intend to make a general comparison of male versus female status at Teotihuacán. Such an approach is grossly simplistic in the context of a complex, multiethnic society. I am interested instead in how gender ideologies, which may have been expressed in the differential treatment of the sexes at death, related to status, occupation, and ethnicity. Simply put, an investigation of gender, as a facet of the social persona, is best contextualized within particular social groups, such as those associated with particular residential areas. The relationship between gender, status, and residential area is investigated as a part of this project, and interpretations will be presented in forthcoming publications.

Discussion

Burial contexts within Teotihuacán’s compounds have most often been treated descriptively in the archaeological literature, which has focused on characterizing mortuary behaviors in a general way. This is understandable, since some broad similarities across the ancient city are readily apparent. Manzanilla (2002), for example, provides a good synthesis of information about “the Teotihuacán mortuary program,” focusing on how mortuary rituals relate to beliefs about and care of the ancestors. Sempowski (1994), in her important study on status differentiation at Teotihuacán, provides a summary of Teotihuacán’s domestic mortuary program, contrasting it with large-scale, public burials associated with monumental architecture. In brief, Teotihuacanos usually buried their dead under the floors of their residences, usually in small rounded pits, with the body in the flexed or seated position. Burials sometimes occurred in private rooms, and sometimes in the central patio spaces of compounds. Both primary and secondary interments were conducted, and most were associated with material offerings, varying from a single object to a large assortment of items.

General syntheses of burial practices are necessary for comprehending Teotihuacán from a culture-historical perspective. They also facilitate an understanding of the practices that differentiated socially disparate segments of the population, such as the ruling elite from the commoner majority. Once the

broad pattern is established, however, there is a danger in characterizing all deviation from it in terms of status. This approach misses a significant opportunity to consider ritual diversity and social variability at Teotihuacán, which is essential for understanding the nature of the society. In spite of the prominence and order conveyed by its monumental architecture, the Teotihuacán state may have succeeded largely because of its socially diverse population. In other words, diverse practices are likely to have reproduced Teotihuacán society, by delineating necessary social distinctions, just as effectively as large-scale conformity in some social arenas may be viewed as integrative. Divisive, as well as integrative, processes are likely to have been necessary for the Teotihuacán state to *work*. Allowing for social differences, perhaps through limited interference with ceremonial life within the walled-off compounds, may well have been in the state's best interest. Immigrants, as important contributors to Teotihuacán economy, would have been attracted by, and more easily absorbed into a colorful mosaic of diverse, rather than homogenous, social milieu.

General similarities in mortuary practices, including those described above, suggest that Teotihuacanos engaged in widely-shared practices that may have had deep roots, perhaps in pan-Mesoamerican cosmological concepts. Differences in the suite of domestic rituals among residential areas, however, suggest that Teotihuacanos also practiced ritual behaviors that were likely to have distinguished them as members of particular social groups within the greater population.

Axotlan

Axotlan, located 35 km west of Teotihuacán on the west banks of lake Xaltocan, was inhabited during the Tlamimilolpa and Xolalpan phases (A.D. 200–500). In 2001, INAH archaeologist Raúl García Chavez (2004) conducted extensive excavations in three Frentes at Axotlan, as part of a large-scale salvage effort. At least two of the Frentes include Teotihuacán-style apartment compounds, each of which shows similar cardinal orientation to those of Teotihuacán (15 degrees east of north). The third may also have been a compound but the architecture was not preserved. Burials from Axotlan, therefore, represent at least two distinctive compounds, as well as a third area that may either represent a degraded compound or several less substantial structures. In general, mortuary practices at Axotlan appear similar to those at Teotihuacán, occurring within residential structures, in small pits, with the body generally in a flexed or seated position. Axotlan was certainly under the political and economic influence of the Teotihuacán state. However, the extent to which Axotlanos identified themselves as Teotihuacanos through behaviors that expressed affiliation with Teotihuacán society, or, alternatively, whether they maintained distinctive local traditions and identity, should be examined.

Unlike the urban locales in this study, osteological data were not previously generated for Axotlan. Osteological materials from Axotlan were analyzed by Anna Novotny as part of the current project. Novotny recorded data on sex, age, pathologies, and cultural modification to the Axotlan skeletons, including forms of cranial deformation and dental modification. In addition, dental metric data were generated in order to compare Axotlan's internal social organization to that of Teotihuacán. These data facilitated an investigation of biodistance, or biological relatedness, among individuals from the three residential areas (Frentes) from which the burials were excavated. Results of principal components analysis on these metric data show that individuals from each of the three Frentes form discrete clusters in multivariate space ([Figure 7](#)). That is, they are relatively internally homogeneous, with greater differences between the residence groups than within them (Novotny and Clayton 2007). This pattern suggests that Axotlanos were residentially organized into kin groups, as Spence has demonstrated was probably the case at Teotihuacán (1973).

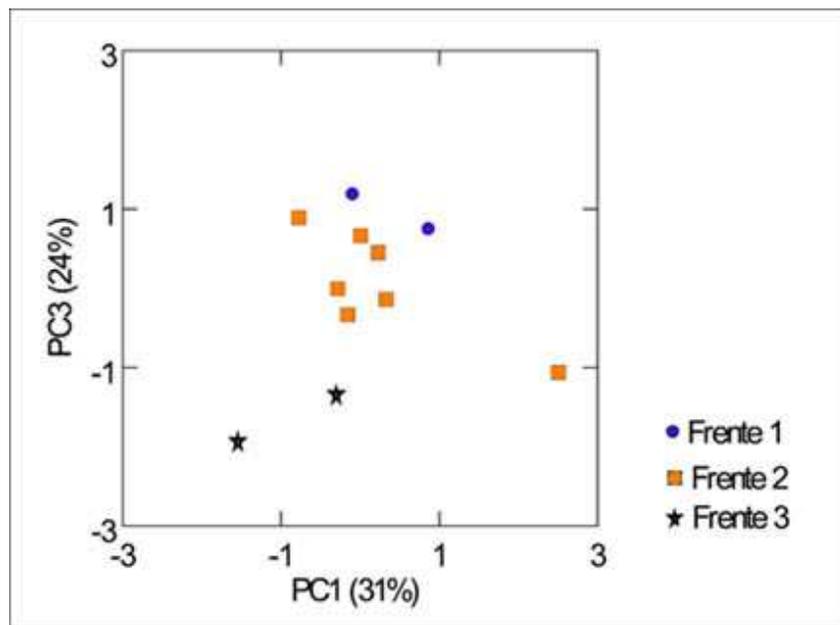


Figure 7. PCA Plot showing individuals by excavation Frente at Axotlan (Novotny and Clayton 2007).

Preliminary results of detailed analyses of the materials from the Axotlan burials show that there were striking similarities in ritual practices between Axotlan and Teotihuacán, as well as subtle differences. This variation attests to the particular decisions and actions of social agents at Axotlan, and appears to reflect an affiliation with the Teotihuacán state as well as social integration and group distinction at the local level.



Figure 8. Ceramics from Axotlan burial contexts.

Strong similarities in the placement and arrangement of burials and the kinds of offerings used at both Teotihuacán and Axotlan suggest that Axotlanos shared similar ideological principles with Teotihuacán's urban population. Some of these practices may have been strongly associated with a state-sanctioned religion, while others may have developed from belief systems that were widely shared in Mesoamerica. Most ceramics used in Axotlan burials would be equally at home in Teotihuacán burials, and include jars, outcurved bowls, miniature vessels (Figure 8), and composite censers (Figure 9). It is clear from the presence of Teotihuacán-style objects that Axotlanos participated in economic exchange networks associated with Teotihuacán, but equally significant is their *selection* of such objects as decidedly appropriate for mortuary ritual. The selection by Axotlanos of *some* objects for use as grave offerings, however, seems to reflect a strong local social identity, expressed through persistent local mortuary traditions and material correlates. For example, burials from every Frente at Axotlan included *tecomates* with punctated surfaces (Figure 10). Tecomates occur in burials at Teotihuacán, but are relatively rare compared to their frequency at Axotlan (they occur in seven burials at Axotlan, and the only one I observed at Teotihuacán was from Burial 261 at Tlailotlacan [Figure 11]). Axotlanos also more frequently scratched motifs along the interior rim of fired, polished outcurving bowls, including crosses, nopales, and obsidian knives (Figure 12). Michael Spence suggests that this may have been a way to mark

ownership (personal communication 2007). Such a practice may have been more frequent at Axotlan than it was in urban Teotihuacán if vessels were acquired from central urban markets, increasing their relative cost to Axotlanos, who lived across the lake, 35 kilometers away.



Figure 9. Guillermo García R. analyzes a censer from Axotlan.



Figure 10. Tecomates from various Axotlan burial contexts.



Figure 11. Tecomate from TL6, Burial 261.



Figure 12. Graffiti on an Axotlan polished bowl.

Analyses of materials from Axotlan are in progress, and will likely reveal significant variation in ritual practices between this settlement and the neighborhoods of urban Teotihuacán. Interestingly, the suite of materials from Axotlan burials appears to more closely resemble that of La Ventilla than Tlajinga 33, suggesting that Axotlanos may have identified socially with a particular subset of Teotihuacán society. This preliminary hypothesis will be tested through further, comparative analyses of the mortuary assemblages from all locales considered.

La Ventilla 3

La Ventilla data for this study are derived from extensive excavations carried out by INAH archaeologist Sergio Gómez C. (2000) in one compound, in an excavation area called Frente 3, as part of a larger project directed by Rubén Cabrera C. For the purposes of this project, I refer to this compound as La Ventilla 3. The greater La Ventilla district was located just west of the Teotihuacán ceremonial core and comprised several separate apartment compounds. How these compounds related to each other socially, and whether the neighborhood formed a social unit itself, is not well-understood at this point. Gómez (2000) has demonstrated that residents of La Ventilla 3 were heavily involved in lapidary work and the crafting of objects from shell. He bases this on the recovery of large amounts of stone and shell objects in various states of production as well as a variety of raw materials, including greenstone, chert,

obsidian, slate, mica, and seashell. This occupational activity was likely a source of social distinction and pride among some compound residents. It was strongly expressed in a few of the La Ventilla burials (n=6) that had great quantities of lapidary-related objects. Burial 102, for example, included two young adult males with hundreds of finished and unfinished objects in shell, greenstone, travertine, obsidian, slate, bone, pyrite, chert, and amethyst quartz. Burial 74 contained a young adult female with 5 obsidian blades, 11 greenstone beads, 9 travertine objects, 6 slate objects, 6 light brown stones with cut marks, and 8 worked shell objects.

La Ventilla burials exhibit some striking distinctions from those of the other sites considered in this study, both in terms of conspicuous differences in the suite of objects included as well as in the range of ritual actions represented.

La Ventilla burials contain objects that have widely been considered “hallmarks” of Teotihuacán domestic ritual, including cylinder tripod vases, candeleros, and composite censers, which were often disassembled for use as burial objects. Descriptions of these ceramic objects and others can be found in Rattray’s general typology (2001). Results from this study suggest that it may be problematic to view all of these objects as “typical” of Teotihuacán ritual practice. For example, although the remains of candeleros are widely distributed spatially across the surface at Teotihuacán, their use may have been linked to a subset of Teotihuacán’s population. More precisely, even if they were used by the majority of Teotihuacanos, their incorporation into mortuary ritual may have varied by neighborhood or residential unit. Candeleros are simple clay objects that range in quality from very clunky and poorly decorated ([Figure 13](#)) to higher quality with polished surfaces ([Figure 14](#)), with the former making up the vast majority. These objects occurred with great frequency in burials at La Ventilla 3 (n=22 burials), but they are conspicuously absent from Tlajinga 33 burial contexts. Candeleros may not have figured into Tlajinga domestic ritual at all, suggesting that residents of these two neighborhoods made differing choices about which objects constituted the necessary ceremonial equipment. By extension, there likely existed differences in ceremonial life among residential groups, with some practices (such as those involving candeleros) present among some groups and absent among others. It is important to note that candeleros were not luxury items. Their absence from Tlajinga 33 burials is more likely the result of a choice not to include them than the result of some sumptuary law or restriction in access.



Figure 13. Common candeleros from La Ventilla 3.



Figure 14. Polished candelero from La Ventilla 3, Burial 236.

Another possible distinction between La Ventilla 3 burials and those of the other sites examined concerns the practice of feasting as a part of the mortuary process, and the incorporation of the material correlates of such behavior into the mortuary context. At La Ventilla 3, large quantities of cooked faunal bones, including bird, deer, dog, tortoise, and primate, were recovered from 17 mortuary contexts along with the human remains. At face value, these contexts could reasonably be interpreted as “midden” interments, in which the individuals were buried in an accumulated pile of domestic trash. This is, indeed, one way to look at it, and cooked animal bones, along with broken sherds, are correctly

interpreted as refuse. However, this simple interpretation is complicated by the frequent recovery of numbers of whole candeleros (from one to more than 40 at a time) associated with the fill in 41% of the burials with cooked faunal remains. I offer a tentative suggestion that the cooked animal bone represents refuse from feasting events that were directly associated with funerary rites commemorating the individual. The patterned association of whole candeleros with faunal remains supports the idea that these contexts resulted from particular ritual behaviors that included the consumption of food, with candeleros as a material correlate. It seems reasonable to envision community members gathering in feasting activities to honor individuals at their death or perhaps their reburial, and to make offerings.



Figure 15. Candeleros from La Ventilla 3, Burial 226.

[Figure 15](#) shows a series of candeleros recovered from one of these contexts, Burial 226, and illustrates that each one is fairly unique in terms of quality, size, and surface decoration. In all cases where more than one candelero was present in a refuse burial, each was distinctive; I believe this to result from production of each one by a different individual. Candeleros were likely used to burn incense, which may have effectively veiled the odor of a body in decay. In addition, they may have provided light during and evening ceremony or procession. As the funerary process culminated in the filling of the grave, participants may have tossed their candeleros into the fill, which included domestic or perhaps feasting refuse, as well as a variety of other materials. Although reconstructions of the series of actions involved in mortuary rituals are speculative, it is certainly possible to identify patterned differences in the materials associated with ritual contexts, and to make reasoned inferences about social variation based on this evidence. The existence of patterned differences in the archaeological traces of ritual behaviors in different neighborhoods supports the hypothesis that ritual practices constituted a significant dimension of social variation at Teotihuacán.

Tlajinga 33

The Tlajinga 33 compound is one of several compounds located in the southwestern area of urban Teotihuacán, just south of the Barranca San Lorenzo, one of the streambeds that crosses the city. Occupants of the Tlajinga 33 compound, and likely of other nearby compounds, made their living as full-time craft specialists, working with lapidary materials from the Late Tlamimilolpa to Early Xolalpan phase (Widmer 1983). Later, San Martin Orange pottery, a distinctive utilitarian ware that was widely distributed at Teotihuacán, was produced in this neighborhood, from the Xolalpan phase onward (Altschul 1987; Sullivan 2006). Local potters also produced vessels in “Tlajinga ware,” which is less-well known and has received much less attention in the literature, with the exception of brief treatment by Sheehy (1998). Tlajinga ware does not appear to constitute a large portion of the Teotihuacán assemblage, though it was locally consumed, and is present in the Tlajinga 33 burials, often as receptacles for deceased infants. An example of a Tlajinga ware bowl, located with Individual 28A, a 3-4 year-old child in a multiple burial context, is provided in [Figure 16](#).

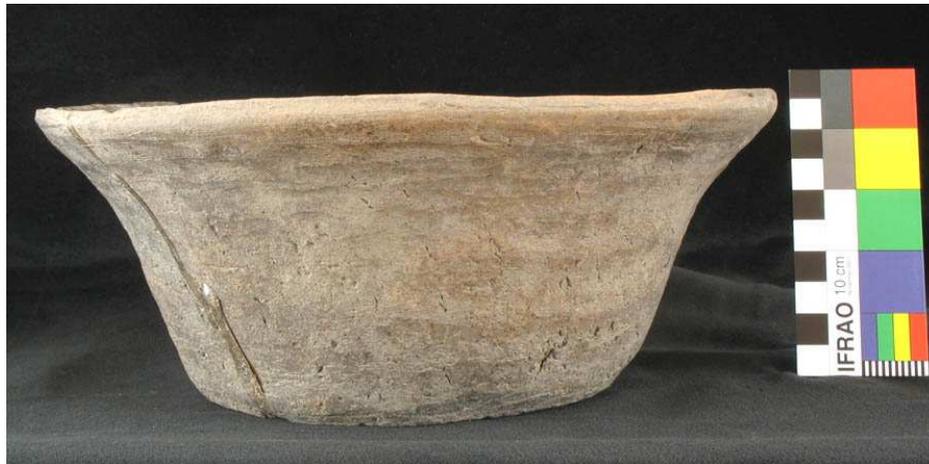


Figure 16. Tlajinga ware bowl, Burial 28A, Tlajinga 33.

I mention craft production at Tlajinga in order to introduce the particular role of this neighborhood within the state economy and because, occupationally, the compound is somewhat similar to La Ventilla 3. Some apparent differences existed between these two artisanal compounds in terms of their mortuary practices, however, including differences in the use of particular objects and associated ritual behaviors. This ritual variation is likely to result from a combination of factors, including differential access to particular objects and resources, as well as differing ideological principles. Occupants of Tlajinga 33 may indeed have represented one of the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy at Teotihuacán, with poor access to resources, as Storey argues (1992). This does

not, however, necessitate an assumption that, given the ability to consume the same suite of objects used in ritual contexts in other compounds, that social agents at Tlajinga would opt to do so, thereby homogenizing themselves with other social groups.

It is appropriate to consider whether Tlajinga 33 was perhaps organized under differing social rules than other compounds, with resident families practicing both integrative and exclusive ritual behaviors that distinguished them from other groups. This notion is especially important given the demonstrated presence of immigrants living in the Tlajinga 33 compound, via stable isotopic analyses (White et al. 2004). The presence of a west Mexican-style shaft tomb within the limits of the compound (Widmer 1987) also throws into question the view that Tlajinga 33 is a “typical” Teotihuacán residence. For that matter, the very notion of the “typical” Teotihuacán compound remains to be demonstrated, and may remain problematic as long as archaeologists dichotomize compounds as representing either the local norm or an immigrant community. Teotihuacán may more appropriately be seen as a very ethnically mixed city, with immigrants sprinkled across the social and spatial landscape, and not limited to the peripheral compounds that are recognized archaeologically as located in ethnic barrios. The view that Teotihuacán was highly heterogeneous is supported by several lines of archaeological (Clayton 2006; Rattray 1987; Taube 2003) and bioarchaeological evidence (Spence 1992; White et al. 2002, 2004).

Among the most striking differences between Tlajinga 33 and the other sites is the larger proportion of Tlajinga burials (36%) in which non-perishable offerings placed in direct association with the deceased individual(s) were absent. At La Ventilla 3, for example, virtually every burial contained objects recorded as direct offerings, with the exception of Burial 46, the secondary interment of a 7 to 12 year-old child. I hesitate to read too much into this pattern, as excavators can differ widely in their interpretation of objects as directly associated with the body in burial contexts. Furthermore, the categorization of objects as *either* purposeful offerings, *or* as unintentional inclusions in the fill, is problematic. Results of this research suggest that the act of filling in the grave carried ritual significance.

As one component of this research, I systematically analyzed objects from the fill lots associated with the Tlajinga 33 burials; these objects were not recorded as offerings in the inventory published for Tlajinga 33 burials (Storey 1994). A detailed examination of materials from the fill indicated that the process of filling in the grave was at least as ritually significant as the placement of objects with the body for residents of Tlajinga 33. This was the case at La Ventilla 3 as well, where candeleros and cooked faunal remains were found in the fill of some burials, along with a diverse assortment of other objects. Tlajinga 33 burial contexts lacked candeleros and evidence for feasting in general, which likely related to a general absence of deer and dog consumption within the compound (Storey 1992). However, the fill of several burials at Tlajinga 33 contained small, usually incurved bowls, which exhibited clear evidence of being purposefully

broken, and tended to occur in groups, rather than as isolated examples. These bowls had been punched through the bottom with a sharp instrument, creating visible points of impact that are colloquially known as “killholes” (Figure 17), and often breaking the vessel. It is important to note that the ideological rationale underlying this practice is by no means thoroughly understood in the archaeological discipline. However, the specific practice of punching a hole in the bottom of a vessel destined for burial is commonly known among Mayanists, and is well documented in the American southwest (Ellis 1968). To my knowledge, it has never before been documented in the Teotihuacán literature. This finding has important implications for the reconstruction of mortuary behaviors, and by extension, for comprehending aspects of ritual ideology among Teotihuacán’s general population.



Figure 17. “Killed” bowls from Tlajinga 33, Burials 41 and 42.

The practice of placing purposefully broken vessels in the burial is not restricted to Tlajinga 33; I also observed it at Axotlan (Figure 18), and it may have occurred at Tlailotlacan and La Ventilla 3 as well. I could not investigate this question for La Ventilla because complete vessels recovered via INAH excavations in the Teotihuacán zone are, as a matter of course, restored as potential museum

objects. This curatorial practice unfortunately has little archaeological value and greatly (often permanently) impedes attempts to gather several kinds of data. “Killed” vessels were not associated with all burials at any of the sites considered, and may instead have been appropriate only in particular situations. Their specific contextual associations are being investigated.



Figure 18. “Killed” bowl from Axotlan, Frente 2, Burial 13.

Along with purposefully broken vessels, Tlajinga 33 burials even more frequently included unexhausted, fairly high quality obsidian blades, often in the fill and sometimes in large quantities (from 1 to 45); these blades were not originally recorded as offerings. [Figure 19](#) shows eleven blades recovered from the fill of Burial 25, the primary interment of a 35-39 year-old female. Blades were present in more than 40% of Tlajinga 33 burials, and likely filled an important role in the suite of mortuary rites practices by residents of this compound.



Figure 19. Obsidian blades from Tlajinga 33, Burial 25 fill.

Another distinguishing aspect of Tlajinga 33 mortuary practices is the more frequent placement of locally produced vessels (San Martin Orange and Tlajinga ware) in the grave context. While this is by no means unexpected, it deserves mention, because it seems to correspond to relatively lower frequencies of the types of vessels common to burial contexts at other compounds. At La Ventilla, for example, the majority of ceramics were probably acquired outside the compound, since pottery production was not a full-time specialization, though residents may have intermittently produced pottery. This has implications for the suite of materials that ultimately ended up as grave offerings, and constitute what we recognize archaeologically as the mortuary assemblage. Many vessels in La Ventilla 3 burials, particularly miniatures, lacked evident usewear, and were likely acquired specifically for funerary purposes. This situation occurred less frequently at Tlajinga 33, where the vast majority of vessels had been previously used.

Tlailotlacan 6

The Tlailotlacan district at Teotihuacán provides some of the clearest evidence of ethnic diversity in the city. This district is considered a Zapotec enclave, due to

the recovery of imported Oaxacan ceramics, as well as imitations made from central Mexican clays, and the presence of distinctive burial tombs in Zapotec style (Spence 1992; 2002). The area is located near the city's western edge and includes about fifteen compounds, six of which have been partially excavated (Croissier 2006; Spence 2002). I examine 16 burials (19 individuals) from Structure 6 (TL6), excavated by Spence, to identify differences in mortuary practice that may have distinguished this neighborhood. For the purposes of this study, Tlailotlacan is simply considered one of Teotihuacán's many residential areas. While I agree that it represents an ethnic enclave with several distinctive elements, I do not necessarily consider it a social anomaly in the context of dominant Teotihuacán society, since the society was ethnically heterogeneous (White et al. 2002).

I focused my analyses on non-tomb burials from TL6 primarily due to their comparability with burials from other compounds. For example, this study includes analyses of the spatial relationships among grave goods and the body of the individual interred. Unfortunately, this information cannot be recorded for the tomb burials because they have been looted. I also focus on non-tomb burials in an effort to investigate the use of Teotihuacán material culture in the mortuary context, as one approach to understanding social identity within the compound. Locally-made objects constitute the majority of the archaeological assemblage recovered from Tlailotlacan. I consider whether such objects were used in the same manner in the Tlailotlacan mortuary ritual as they tended to be used in other Teotihuacán neighborhoods. For example, did residents of TL6 select a similar suite of objects for use as mortuary offerings as the residents of other urban compounds? Did the manner of burial at TL6 signify the identity of the deceased as an immigrant, a local marriage partner, or a person born into the community? These questions are complex, and may not be fully answered in the course of this research, especially given the small sample of burials from TL6, but I believe they are worth considering.

Data generated from the analyses of materials from TL6 burials are still being analyzed, but some significant differences between mortuary practices at TL6 and those from other compounds are already apparent. For example, 26% of individuals buried in TL6 were placed in the extended position, which is comparatively rare at the other sites considered in this study. Three individuals at Axotlan were placed in this position (3%), and one of these was anomalous, placed with the arms behind the back, in a position associated with sacrifice in state-level ritual contexts (Sugiyama 2005). Only one individual (of 173) was extended at La Ventilla 3, Burial 125, which was an adult male, oriented east-west, the same general orientation of extended burials at TL6. I expect that, even given the use of locally-produced objects in the context of mortuary ritual, the TL6 burials will differ significantly from those in other residential areas.

Final Comments

In this report I have attempted to describe some important qualitative differences in mortuary practices associated with four separate locales at Teotihuacán, in order to address the degree of social diversity among Teotihuacán's general population. Although the interpretations presented are preliminary, it is clear that ritual practices and their material correlates varied among these residential areas, and that this variation related to other facets of daily life and group identity, including ethnicity and occupational roles. This does not mean that broad similarities in domestic ritual practices, and their associated belief systems, did not exist among Teotihuacanos. Social agents at Teotihuacán may be best understood as having made particular selections from among a constellation of possible practices and material objects in the context of domestic ritual. This lexicon of options is likely to have related to shared concepts about who they were in the context of Mesoamerican society, and perhaps to commonly held notions about what it meant to be a member of Teotihuacán society.

Patterns at the level of the residential group, which was likely organized on a kinship basis (Novotny and Clayton 2007; Spence 1973), seem to have expressed a localized identity. That is, individuals living in close proximity seem to have practiced internally similar sets of behaviors in the context of mortuary rituals. This pattern indicates that group participation in such events was limited to the compound or perhaps the larger community in some cases. At the same time, ritual practices that cross-cut residential areas, such as the use of a similar suite of materials at Axotlan and La Ventilla, may suggest the existence of distinct large scale social groups. These questions will be further evaluated through multivariate analyses aimed at identifying patterned relationships among sets of variables associated with mortuary practices across space.

Investigation of social identity at Teotihuacán will necessarily involve careful consideration of patterned associations among objects and specific mortuary practices with individuals of particular sex and age and by residential locale. This approach will aid in establishing whether practices that were patterned on the basis of gender or age differed among residential areas. Results will contribute to a clearer picture of social organization and the nature of the state, which may have enjoyed its long term success based on the maintenance of practices that were integrative, fostering a sense of shared identity, as well as divisive, promoting important social distinctions.

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