

## **Special Section: Recent Research in the Lake Basins of Highland Jalisco**

### **Introduction**

Christopher S. Beekman

William R. Fowler

Phil C. Weigand

Western Mexico has long been characterized as composed of simple, small-scale village societies, without significant social ranking, population centers, or large scale economic systems. Inhabitants of the region were portrayed as obsessed with a Cult of the Dead, vividly represented by the shaft and chamber tombs found across the region, and the near ethnographic quality ceramic figures looted from them.

The indications of more complex systems that have invariably cropped up over the years have tended to be explained away as inspired by Teotihuacan, Toltec, or even South American sources. The apparent (or imagined) absence of the defining features of complex society has even led some to deny the region membership in Mesoamerica prior to the Postclassic, and propose greater underlying similarities to the American Southwest or South America.

Yet these minimalist interpretations were based almost entirely upon surface studies emphasizing the delineation of ceramic spheres, and an overemphasis on the well-known, but unprovenanced, ceramic figures looted from the shaft tombs. Settlement surveys, extensive excavations, and an emphasis on theoretical issues were slow in coming.

It has been primarily the research into the shaft tombs and the Teuchitlán Tradition of highland Jalisco that has most seriously damaged these stereotypes and infused archaeologists in this area with a spirit of excitement and scholarly debate that barely existed before. Beginning in the late 1960s with Weigand's settlement survey in the heart of shaft tomb territory (Weigand 1974), and continuing in the early 1970s with INAH's salvage excavations of two dozen shaft tombs near Guadalajara, research in the region began to come of age (Galván 1991).

Yet museums and general textbooks have frequently continued to encourage this normative view of western Mexico. Although we have, at times, been pessimistic about the slow diffusion of the revisionist view to our colleagues, the interest shown by the editors of *Ancient Mesoamerica* in devoting an issue to the region provided us with an opportunity to summarize some of the recent findings for our colleagues.

**Phil C. Weigand** leads off the special section with a discussion of the distinctive architecture that defines the Teuchitlán Tradition, providing an overview of its development over time and the ritual activities that may have been associated with it. **Michael A. Ohnersorgen** and **Mark D. Varien** contribute nearest neighbor and gravity model analyses of Weigand's settlement data, providing an alternative, more heavily statistical, perspective.

**Jorge Ramos de la Vega** and **Lorenza López Mestas C.** report on their important work at the Late Formative/Early Classic center at Huitzilapa, including the first archaeological excavation of a major shaft tomb clearly associated with the Teuchitlán Tradition architecture.

**Christopher Beekman** summarizes recent research in the La Venta Corridor, the conduit between the Tequila and Atemajac valleys. This study traces the history of an apparent political boundary from the Classic period, and its implications for interpretations of the Teuchitlán Tradition.

Another two papers present new studies of the ceramics and architectural models associated with the well known shaft tombs and their less famous successors. **Jane Day** investigates the evidence for the ball game; **Kristi Butterwick** examines household and community organization; **Robert Pickering** discusses creative ways to authenticate the ceramic figures that seem to populate every museum or private collection in the country. **Meredith A. Aronson** brings a very different perspective to the study of the production and use of artifacts associated with the shaft tombs and the box tombs that eventually replace them during the Classic period.

Though not discussing the Teuchitlán Tradition *per se*, **Francisco Valdez** and his colleagues at ORSTOM focus on the Sayula basin to the south, where their research has uncovered an extensive salt production industry in the Classic and Postclassic periods. Specialists in coastal Guatemalan and northern Yucatecan archaeology may find this study particularly

valuable for comparative data.

These papers, describing the evidence for monumental architecture, impressive settlement systems, complex political strategies, state-linked ritual activity, and large scale economic specialization, specifically emphasize those elements traditionally thought not to exist in western Mexico. They also demonstrate how the ceramic figures might be more productively analyzed than in the past.

There is little evidence for Jalisco's (or even western Mexico's) participation in Olmec symbolism during the Formative, the purported presence of Teotihuacan dwindles with continuing research, and much of this area was beyond even the reach of the Tarascan empire during the Late Postclassic. Nonetheless, western Mexico clearly participated in the ebb and flow of social change that we see across Mesoamerica during its long history: the origins of mortuary ritualism and social ranking in the Early Formative (Oliveros 1974); the development of regional political and economic systems in the Classic; the collapse/reorganization of society in the Epiclassic (Beekman in press); and the rise of new polities in the Postclassic claiming descent from northern populations (Weigand and García de Weigand in press). While the material culture may appear exotic, the trajectory of change and the theoretical issues involved should be familiar to all Mesoamericanists.

Western Mexico as a whole is experiencing a tremendous increase in the number of researchers, Mexican and foreign, and this issue follows some of the current threads of scholarship in Jalisco. Research in the coming years promises to dramatically transform our view of the region even further.

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