

**Lineage Tombs and Lineage Relations
in Formative to Classic Period Jalisco**

by

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Abstract

The well-known shaft tombs and their distinctive offerings of realistic figurines have come to define Formative and Classic period (1500 B.C.- A.D. 400+) West Mexico for many archaeologists, but despite various lines of evidence that the tombs are based around elite lineages, this avenue of investigation has not been thoroughly explored. This paper discusses the existing evidence for a lineage focus to the shaft tombs, which includes contextual, comparative, and more recent biological studies. In particular, the paper will examine the link between the tombs and the distinctive circular surface architecture of the Teuchitlan Tradition beneath which they begin to appear in the Late Formative. I argue that with the integration of public architecture and new concepts of sacred space, the significance of lineage ties was altered by a shift in focus to broader community ritual over mortuary ritual. With the later Classic period and the establishment of a centralized polity, competition between lineages became less intense as it was subverted to the states need for stability and conformity, and this is reflected in the organization of the architecture. A shared ideology and commitment to agreed-upon pathways to power in this pristine polity resulted in rather low Heterogeneity (in McGuire's terms), and a remarkably uniform appearance to the architecture even when exported to neighboring regions.

Introduction

For many Mesoamericanists, the defining feature of West Mexican archaeology is the shaft tomb mortuary complex. This was basically composed of deep excavated tombs, typically with multiple interments that occasionally show signs of being deposited over an extended period, accompanied by a stunning array of hollow figures to accompany the dead to the afterlife. In addition to the figures, artifacts of imported materials like jade, or Pacific or Caribbean shell commonly appear. Although the shaft tombs and the figures are best known from the Late Formative (300 B.C.-A.D.200), they had been used for at least a thousand years by that time, and are to be found across a wide area from their very inception.

The variation in this mortuary complex can be considerable. Archaeologists have described shafts and chambers of varying shapes, steps into the chamber, benches around the interior walls, niches, and other attributes that make each tomb unique. Some tombs have so many people within that they have become ossuaries of jumbled bone, and even cremations have been identified. But whatever the differences, there are certain recurring themes, as we shall see - 1) the variability in labor expenditure and wealth between tombs; 2) the frequent but selective association of the shaft tombs with surface structures; and 3) the common reuse of the tombs by members of the same social, even biological, group. I argue that together these describe a society of ranked, competing lineages.

The Formative Strategy

First of all, the tombs are restricted to a limited sector of the population. Of all the burials identified in central Jalisco, only 10% are in shaft tombs, the remainder being found in simple pits. Shaft tombs plot nicely into several ranks based upon labor investment, whether calculated by depth of the shaft, the number of chambers, or the total volume. The highest ranked tombs are consistently associated with public architecture, while the lesser ranked tombs occur in cemeteries, or as isolated tombs beneath houses. There is thus a gradient of increasing association of tombs with architecture, first residential and then public, as one moves up the social hierarchy. We are therefore describing the specifically *political* elite. The martial component of elite identity seems strongly evidenced by certain of the tomb offerings; figures of warriors, battle scenes,

trophy heads, and the taking of prisoners. Clearly, warfare was a major outlet for the rivalry between the elites from this period.

The offerings found in the tombs reflect another form of competition, however. By their very nature, prestige goods demonstrate the abilities of their owner to control labor - whether the skilled artisans needed to make a hollow figure or more elaborately decorated pottery, or the trading partners necessary to obtain materials like jade from sources hundreds or thousands of kilometers away. The possession of these prestige goods, and especially their wasteful interment with the dead, amply demonstrated the wealth and social connections of not just an individual, but also his/her social group. Consider how ceramic models depict an elaborate sequence of mourning or preparation of the dead, and processions carrying the body to the tomb for burial. The act of interment was clearly a public occasion, and an opportunity for these competing elite groups to demonstrate their social connections and control over labor pools through display and ritual performance. Pickering's osteological analysis of the skeletal remains from the Huitzilapa tomb would seem to indicate that five of the six occupants were closely related genetically; group endogamy must have had a relatively long history to result in the markers noted by Pickering, strongly pointing towards lineages as the nucleus of these competing elite groups.

There are also certain parallels to the contemporary familial Zapotec tombs in the state of Oaxaca, several hundred kilometers to the southeast. The earliest shaft tombs with stairways, as at El Opeño, show the greatest formal similarities to the Zapotec examples, and suggest a very early connection between these regions. Not only are there morphological similarities, but the Zapotec examples have similar associations with surface structures, and possessed offerings perhaps symbolically comparable. Debates regarding the Zapotec tombs have also revolved around very similar issues, and the growing consensus there appears to link the tombs to lineages.

These lineages appear to have been the core element of political centralization in Formative West Mexico. The bodies of high ranking individuals decorated with labor-intensive jewelry and accompanying offerings were ostentatiously carried in procession to a place of burial with longstanding associations to a particular lineage. As with Mesoamerican political ritual elsewhere, this performance went hand in hand with the development of status; not only did the public ritual emphasize individual and lineage prestige and gather adherents through this

mechanism, but the labor pool to which the lineage now had access would allow even more ostentatious ceremony at future burial events. Shaft tomb ritual was therefore both cause and effect of competition between lineages seeking labor through public prestige. This rivalry and tendency towards one-upmanship also resulted in the heterogeneous set of tomb forms and practices that we are just beginning to plot out today. To be sure, common symbolic threads were to be found, such as the repeated motifs of ceramic dogs, conch shell trumpets, and horned headdresses, but the dominant theme at this point appears to be the individual expression of power at the local level.

But the small underground tombs limited public participation to the preliminaries alone, and probably only a very small number of lineage members could ever actually enter a tomb. Furthermore, the rather unpredictable nature of death would tend to prevent any regular scheduling to these interments. As a result, although the mortuary ritual may well have provided prestige to elites, it was probably not too effective at integrating larger groups at the community level or beyond. Competition among lineages for the top position within the community must have been endemic, and of varying degrees of subtlety, hence the powerful martial emphasis in figurines and offerings.

The New Strategy of the Late Formative/Classic

The lineage basis to West Mexican political organization seems to have been deliberately altered in central Jalisco beginning in the Late Formative (300 B.C. - A.D. 200). In a quantitative sense, the highland lake basins of central Jalisco had always been the core of the shaft tomb complex - the hierarchy of tombs and the range of labor investment in tomb and offerings was much more strongly pronounced here than anywhere else in West Mexico. But these successes, and the growing power of a smaller number of lineages, allowed a *qualitative* change that I characterize as a shift in political strategy by these elites.

Beginning in the Late Formative, central Jalisco populations begin to build distinctive concentric circular architecture that we call the Teuchitlan Tradition, depicted here in modern archaeological and ancient indigenous manners of expression. Several of the highest ranking shaft

tombs have been found beneath these outer structures, and I suspect that each of these buildings had a distinct lineage association.

Excavations at circles from later periods have encountered human remains beneath the central altar, but it is the ceramic dioramas that provide the most useful information about the function of this architecture. We have frequent representations of groups of people dancing in a ring, ideally suited to the circular patios. Ceramic models depict individuals who climb tall poles set into the central altars, and then balance on top. These have been argued by various authors to depict the Mesoamerican *volador* ritual or related pole-climbing ceremonies with agricultural significance. I will discuss this more next year at the SAAs, but for example, the Teuchitlan architecture itself looks remarkably like a cross-section of local varieties of maize available during the Classic period, and rituals practiced in one of these circles by Tepecano Indians around the turn of the century all revolved around rain and maize. There has clearly been some kind of transition here from the relatively private, exclusionary mortuary ritual that aggrandized elite individuals and lineages, to this new corporate ritual that focused on topics of more direct interest to farmers and the non-elite, probably operating on more of a predictable schedule as well, centered on the agricultural cycle.

Clearly, much of Mesoamerican architecture served in a similar capacity. They were stages and backdrops to elite public performance, whether this is defined as storytelling, feasting, or sacrifice. Public architecture held the potential, I argue, to incorporate more followers and increase group prestige that would support the ranking system. However, in order for this to work, the thousand years of lineage competition and conflict would have to be suppressed in favor of more community centered ritual, and I think this is exactly what we see as the Classic period (A.D.200-700) progresses. Beginning in the Early Classic, the shaft tombs decline rapidly in size and variability, labor intensive offerings like the hollow figures drop out, and the number of interments within the tombs declines. Even the high quality pottery is less elaborately constructed and decorated, and eccentric obsidian jewelry drops out. I think that the competition over prestige that had taken place in mortuary ritual had now declined, and there was less identification of lineages with the tombs.

But do not interpret this as a less complex political system. The Teuchitlan Tradition architecture was becoming much larger and more complex, a 3-4 step hierarchy of circles and settlements developed, and population within the central lakes developed into a conservatively estimated 50-60,000 people. There is evidence for very complex agricultural intensification, possible intervention in the control of basic materials like obsidian, and the establishment of a ring of defensive sites that sealed off the central core area, strongly implying a single administration for this area. Yet as these social processes take place, the fancy items decline in importance, since their real purpose as social plumage was no longer necessary or desirable. The individual expression of power was forced to give way to the growth of a shared ideology, and agreed-upon pathways to power. To use Randall McGuire's terminological breakdown of cultural complexity, *Heterogeneity* had declined while *Inequality* had increased.

This does not mean that lineages were dismantled, but the conflict between them that had served to gather power into the hands of just a few high ranking lineages now prevented any further consolidation from taking place. The suppression of this conflict, probably by the most powerful of these lineages, crossed a qualitative threshold in the field of elite social relationships. The role lineages and lineage relations played in the distribution of power had been altered, and in ways that we are just beginning to examine.