

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE
CENTRAL JALISCO SHAFT TOMBS**

by

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Introduction

Recent archaeological research in western Mexico has been characterized by vastly increased fieldwork and a greater emphasis upon theoretical issues. Yet research has been hampered by our dependence upon the often crude, three phase sequences developed since the 1930s by Kelly (1945, 1949), Lister (1949), and others, which have often been left enshrined as complete without further attempts at refinement by later researchers. Such gross breakdowns of ceramic evolution are not an indication that there was no change, but rather expose the preliminary nature of most chronological research that has been done in west Mexico. Unfortunately, the enormous periods of apparent stasis created by these sequences have often been taken as indicators of a lack of social change as well. This is particularly true in relation to the so-called "Shaft Tomb Complex" (Schöndube 1980).

In this paper, I plan to discuss some recent research into the chronology of this phenomenon, specifically its manifestation in north-central Jalisco, although this burial complex is, of course, distributed across a much wider area. A considerable amount of effort has already been expended on integrating shaft tombs into Weigand's Teuchitlán Tradition architectural sequence (e.g. Weigand 1985), but I will be focusing on changes in the ceramic sequence. I will also be concentrating on the shaft tombs from the Late Formative and Classic period, and not the El Opeño style tombs (Oliveros 1974, 1992) known from this area beginning in the Early to Middle Formative (Weigand 1985), for which there are virtually no ceramic data.

Central Jalisco

Research into the chronology of the shaft tombs has been primarily within the Tequila and Atemajac valley systems of central Jalisco (e.g. Weigand 1979, 1985; Schöndube and Galván 1978; Galván 1991), the region with the most elaborate and largest number of examples (Map 1). The phases defined by Weigand in the valleys ringing the Volcán de Tequila are distinguished by architectural changes. In this sequence, El Opeño style tombs develop into the straight shaft and chamber tombs by at least the Late Formative El Arenal phase, and presumably earlier. The following Ahualulco phase already marks the decline of the labor investment in the tombs and their accompanying offerings. This mortuary pattern continues to simplify until sometime during

the Middle to Late Classic Teuchitlán I phase, when these tombs are replaced by the very different box tombs (Weigand 1992).

Although not the defining feature of these architectural phases, certain ceramic types have been defined as flags for use in areas with less distinctive structure forms (Weigand 1992: Figure 9). These have since been more extensively described based on the sample from the La Venta Corridor linking the Tequila and Atemajac valleys (Beekman 1996: Chapter 5). Ahualulco Red on Cream begins in the El Arenal phase and continues through at least the Ahualulco phase (200 B.C.-A.D. 400/500) (Beekman 1996: 518-537) (Figures 1-3). Oconahua Red on White is a fine, thin ceramic with occasionally fine-lined designs, and spans the latter part of El Arenal and into the Ahualulco phase (A.D.1-300+) (Beekman 1996: 455-481) (Figures 4-6). Oconahua Red on White is essentially the same as Ameca Grey, a type partially described by both Isabel Kelly (1948) and Stanley Long (1966) during their own studies in this region. Later, probably developing out of Oconahua, comes Teuchitlán Red on Cream, which is thicker, with a more matte finish, different paste characteristics distinguishable by visual and petrographic analysis, and with slight iconographic details that to my eye suggest the designs that occur with much greater prominence beginning in the Epiclassic (A.D. 600-900) (Beekman 1996: 497-510) (Figures 7-9). The Teuchitlán type begins sometime during the Ahualulco phase and ends during Teuchitlán I, or possibly II. Each of these types is of course only one among many that share the same paste, firing pattern, and surface finish. There are a variety of plain, reduce-fired, red-slipped, or other types in each of these wares, best described by Galván (1991: Chapter 4) and Beekman (1996: 452-559).

It is clear that the materials from the Tequila region during the El Arenal/ Ahualulco/ Teuchitlán I architectural phases are generally contemporaneous with those of the Tabachines phase in the adjacent Atemajac valley. Galván (1991) defined the Tabachines phase after INAH's excavations of two dozen shaft tombs in the site of the same name, and divided the period into Early and Late subphases. Distributed between these subphases were different Red on Cream types corresponding reasonably well to the Tequila valley types. Colorines Lineas Multiples and Rojo/Crema Ollas correspond very well to Ahualulco Red/Cream (Galván 1991: 48-63). Tabachines Rojo/Crema is a clear parallel to Oconohua Red/White (Galván 1991: 67-70). The Atemajac valley type Arroyo Seco Rojo Amplio appears to correspond roughly to Teuchitlán Red

on Cream (Galván 1991: 73-75), although with much simpler red decoration more akin to a slip. Certain olla and deep bowl forms also appear distinct, but are actually better represented among Teuchitlán Red/Cream's plain counterparts in the same ware (Beekman 1996: 510-517).

I felt that the Tabachines shaft tomb lots could be re-examined and even seriated to provide more information. To provide a framework, those tombs for which Galván had obtained obsidian hydration readings were ordered by their dates. After arranging the listing of ceramic types and lithic artifacts to correspond to this sequence, I then proceeded to insert the tomb lots for which there were no absolute chronological data. The result is a very clear three part division, which I call Early, Middle, and Late Tabachines (Table 1). Tabachines Rojo/Crema was limited to the first two phases, Arroyo Seco Rojo Amplio to the last two, and Colorines R/C types were found throughout the sequence, but with each decorative sub-type pertaining to different phases. Middle Tabachines might be interpreted as transitional or as a period of overlap, but some specific ceramic types were limited to that subphase, and many objects associated with the heyday of the shaft tombs drop out after Early Tabachines, such as the hollow figurines and obsidian jewelry (Figure 10).

With this new three phase breakdown of Tabachines, the distribution of the Atemajac valley parallels to Weigand's Red on Creams corresponds more closely to his placement of these critical types (Weigand 1992: Figure 9). Ahualulco Red on Cream, found in the El Arenal, Ahualulco and Teuchitlán I phases, corresponds to two types within the Colorines group that extend across all three Tabachines subphases. Oconahua Red on White, from the late El Arenal through Ahualulco phases, is essentially identical to Tabachines Rojo/Crema, found in Early and Middle Tabachines. Finally, Teuchitlán Red/Cream, which occurs in the Ahualulco and Teuchitlán I phases, corresponds somewhat more roughly to Arroyo Seco Rojo Amplio, from the Middle and Late Tabachines subphases.

There are culture-historical parallels between the two valley sequences that may also aid in integrating the two chronologies. There is a decline in the effort put into building the shaft tombs during the Middle and Late Tabachines subphases (Galván 1991: 256,299), a trend also noted in the Tequila valleys during the Ahualulco and Teuchitlán I phases (Weigand 1979,1985).

These points all argue for Early Tabachines to correspond to the latter half of the El Arenal architectural phase. The Middle Tabachines phase appears less well defined, but I would equate it with the Ahualulco phase, which is itself an incompletely delineated phase (Weigand 1985:70). The Late Tabachines subphase would therefore correspond to the Teuchitlán I phase up until the coming of very different ceramics around A.D. 550/600 as part of the El Grillo complex.

Absolute Chronology

Putting absolute dates to the correlated sequences is more of a challenge. Galván reports a series of obsidian hydration dates for the Tabachines phase, and one from the following El Grillo phase in the Atemajac valley (1991: 256; Schöndube and Galván 1978: 163-164). They bracket the three part breakdown quite well, but the dates were calculated in the 1970s, prior to any of the refinements considered critical today, such as thermal sensors, etc. Considering the complexities and controversies involved in hydration dating today (e.g. Webster and Freter 1990; Braswell 1992; Webster, et al. 1993), the dates as reported cannot be taken at face value. Hence, I remain skeptical of the absolute dates that have been assigned to the phases, although I found the hydration readings very useful for the relative ordering of the tombs.

Recent chronological data has come from the salvage excavations at Huitzilapa, in the Magdalena valley, for the early part of the sequence. Jorge Ramos and Lorenza López have already discussed the shaft tomb excavated during this rescue work (1996), and I would only like to add a comment regarding the associated ceramics. Although the ceramic assemblage from the tomb has not been described in detail as yet, specific elements that are chronologically useful include El Arenal style hollow figurines, Tabachines Black, Oconahua Red on White, and a much greater number of the more finely made Ahualulco Red on Creams. In terms of the modified ceramic chronology, these materials would place the tomb fairly clearly in the Early Tabachines phase. Their excellent collection of calibrated radiocarbon dates, clustering in the 1st century A.D., establishes a minimum starting date for Early Tabachines, which I may begin around 1 A.D.

The Middle Tabachines phase, much like the Ahualulco phase, is a bridge between the more clearly defined Late Formative and Middle Classic societies in the region, and is frequently difficult to isolate on its own (Weigand 1974; 1985:70-72). The transition from the Early to

Middle Tabachines ceramic phases, occurring about the same time as the El Arenal to Ahualulco architectural transition, is particularly difficult to place. The start of the phase should be located after the Huitzilapa radiocarbon dates (approx. A.D. 50-100), yet prior to the Ahualulco phase structure at the same site, with two calibrated radiocarbon dates in the 3rd century on materials from its fill. This is consistent with Weigand's longstanding estimate of 200 A.D.

Long's (1966) study of the San Sebastián shaft tomb in the 1960s provides somewhat contradictory evidence. The San Sebastián tomb was believed to have been re-used, and had chronological markers from all three of Long's now discarded phases. The uncalibrated radiocarbon dates appeared to pertain to early and later periods of use and, on the basis of an exhaustive seriation of stylistic attributes (Long 1966: 21-36), Long felt that the tomb was composed of earlier and later interments with the Oconahua Red/White vessels as part of the later group (Long 1966: 93).

Whether one accepts that particular argument or not, after recalibration using the CALIB 3.0 program (and reservoir-specific corrections for upwelling in the case of the shell samples) (Stuiver and Pearson 1993; Stuiver and Braziunas 1993), there is no clear separation in the dates (Table 2). Intercepts and one sigma standard deviations range primarily from A.D. 250-400, with the two shell dates at the beginning and the two bone dates at the end of that span. A third shell date gave an inexplicably late date centering on the eighth century A.D.

The problem is, to which phase do these age determinations belong? The form and depth of the shaft tomb suggest the El Arenal phase, but since the following Ahualulco phase is considered transitional, it probably cannot be ruled out. The published descriptions (Long 1966) of the pottery from the tomb undoubtedly indicate Oconahua Red/White and Ahualulco Red/Cream, but the presence of obsidian jewelry and hollow figures suggests an Early Tabachines date. Therefore, either: 1) the dates are too late; 2) they extend the Early Tabachines phase 100 years later than expected, or 3) some of the elite markers of the Early Tabachines phase continue into Middle Tabachines. I currently prefer option 3, and use the radiocarbon dates to place the Middle to Late Tabachines interface at around A.D. 400/450. I have argued elsewhere for the end of the Late Tabachines phase at around A.D. 550/600 (Beekman in press).

Conclusions

I have presented the primary evidence, at present, for a three part breakdown of the Tabachines "shaft tomb" phase, and for the absolute dates of its components, by focusing on certain well-defined decorative wares. I have proposed an Early Tabachines phase from A.D. 1-200, which blurs into a Middle Tabachines phase from A.D. 200-400/450, and Late Tabachines from A.D. 400/450-550/600. While this chronology seems to work for the Atemajac valley, and it would appear to serve in the Teuchitlán core area as well, there will undoubtedly be differences requiring a great deal of research to work out. Much better descriptions of the rest of the ceramic assemblages for these periods is critical, particularly for the Tequila valleys.

Unfortunately, these ceramic phases must stand on their own for now. Most of the published ceramic sequences that exist for western Mexico are more concerned with later periods, while early materials are often ill-defined, and typically recovered from surface contexts. As a result, the tripartite division of the Red on Creams in central Jalisco, and their chronological ordering, is difficult to corroborate through comparative research, as all three types would typically be encompassed within a single "shaft tomb phase" in older publications (e.g. Kelly 1949). Most of the very general descriptions of red on creams elsewhere in west Mexico are simply too vague to correlate with these types. Despite the frequent overemphasis in western Mexico upon ceramic types for the delineation of synchronic ceramic "provinces" (Kelly 1948; Schöndube 1980), and even for sociological interpretation, ceramic descriptions have nonetheless been quite brief and insufficient for any detailed research. As a good chronological sequence is the backbone of any culture-historical reconstruction, and complex theoretical issues are impossible to address without it, considerably greater effort must be invested in both stratigraphic excavation and the adequate description of the materials recovered.

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