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Alternative Pathways to Power in Formative Oaxaca

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Richard Blanton has been at the forefront of research aimed at broadening archaeological approaches to the development and organization of early complex societies (Blanton 1998a; Blanton and Fargher 2008; Blanton et al. 1996). In particular, he has challenged archaeologists to expand views of political complexity beyond traditional conceptions of highly integrated polities with well-developed hierarchies led by powerful rulers. Instead, Blanton has sought to problematize the concept of social integration in complex societies and to consider collective or corporate forms of political organization by examining the ways that rulers and subordinates collaborate to develop and maintain polities. While collective political organization can entail assembly or council-based government without individual rulers, it also includes governments with powerful rulers who gain and retain authority by complying with collective moral codes.

Blanton and his colleagues (Blanton and Fargher 2008; Fargher et al. 2010) argue that a key process in complex polities involves bargaining between rulers and subjects. They assert that rulers will be more likely to bargain with subjects to the degree that the former are dependent on the surplus production, labor, and taxable commercial transactions of the latter. When rulers largely depend on resources mobilized from followers (internal revenue), rather than external sources like imperial tribute or imported valuables (external revenue), followers are in a stronger position to make

demands from rulers in return for their compliance. Rulers, in turn, provide public goods and services like military defense, judicial services, and sponsorship of public rituals. Subaltern compliance can also be achieved through coercion, although the greater the force used to control subjects the greater the incentives for resistance and rebellion. Rulers and subjects therefore pursue a continuous process of negotiation through which a temporary and contingent form of social contract is constructed. We find Blanton's perspective especially effective because, unlike traditional cultural evolutionist perspectives, it leaves room for agency as well as social and historical contingency.

In this chapter, we draw on Blanton's work to compare the negotiation of political authority during the emergence of two complex, urban polities at the end of the Formative period in Oaxaca: Monte Albán in the Valley of Oaxaca and Río Viejo in the lower Río Verde valley in the Pacific coastal lowlands. Following from our previous research (Barber 2013; Barber and Joyce 2007; Joyce 2000, 2010), we examine evidence from both regions for tension and conflict between more traditional, corporate, and egalitarian (*senza* Blanton 1998a) forms of authority and leaders who were trying to extend their political influence to the broader region. We argue that the outcomes of attempts to institutionalize more expansive forms of authority were dramatically different. The Río Viejo polity collapsed circa AD 250, perhaps due to internal conflict resulting ultimately from what Blanton and Fargher (2008:112) term "collective action problems." In contrast, the rulers of Monte Albán were successful in establishing hierarchical institutions that persisted for centuries, although the evidence suggests that their success may have come via the suppression of internal enemies and a greater reliance on external sources of revenue. Drawing on the collective action perspective of Blanton and Fargher (2008), we consider some of the factors that may account for the divergent histories of these two polities.

POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND INTEGRATION IN LATER FORMATIVE OAXACA

The Later Formative period (400 BC–AD 250) throughout much of Mesoamerica was a time of emerging political centralization and the expansion of political authority over broader regions and larger populations (e.g., Joyce 2010; Pool 2008; Sugiyama 1993). In Oaxaca, archaeologists have shown that the social changes that occurred with the emergence of early urban centers included increased inequality, warfare, the mobilization of labor for the construction of monumental architecture, changes in settlement patterns and social organization, and innovations in religion, ideology, and economy.

MONTE ALBÁN

The founding and early development of Monte Albán represents a dramatic transformation in social and political relations in the Oaxaca Valley. Monte Albán was founded circa 500 BC on a previously unoccupied series of hillsops in the center of the Oaxaca Valley (Blanton 1978; Joyce 2010; Marcus and Flannery 1996; Winter 2001) and quickly grew into an urban center. By 300 BC Monte Albán far exceeded any other site in the valley in size, population, and scale of monumental architecture. During the Late Formative (300–100 BC) the city grew to cover 442 ha with an estimated population of 10,200–20,400 (Blanton 1978:44). Data pertaining to the first several centuries after the founding of Monte Albán indicate that hierarchical rulership emerged in the context of more traditional, communal forms of authority (Joyce 2010). Indeed, hereditary status distinctions in the Valley of Oaxaca are clearly evident only a century or two prior to the founding of Monte Albán (Blanton et al. 1999:36–42; Joyce 2010:111–114; cf. Marcus and Flannery 1996:93–110).

Late Formative residential and mortuary data indicate increasing status differentiation although it appears that commoners could acquire significant wealth, a pattern consistent with more corporate forms of political organization. Excavations at Monte Albán suggest that high-status residences were concentrated in areas around the North Platform, a public ceremonial space (Joyce 2010:142–143, 156). The most completely excavated Late Formative high-status house in the region is the Area I residence at the site of El Palenque, which Spencer and Redmond (2004) argue was a ruler's residence. It covered an area of 16 m x 16 m including eight rooms arranged around a central patio measuring 8 m x 8 m. Ritual feasting may have occurred in a paved courtyard east of the residence. Presumably, rulers' houses at Monte Albán were at least as elaborate as the Area I residence at El Palenque. At Tomaltepec, Whalen (1988) excavated the residence of a local elite family. In contrast to the possible royal residence at El Palenque, the Tomaltepec residence is similar in size to low-status houses (Winter 1986), but included a stone masonry tomb with an elaborate offering. The Tomaltepec residence was located near the site's ceremonial center, a pattern also seen with high-status residences at El Palenque and Monte Albán.

Although royal residences seem to have been considerably more elaborate than typical houses, mortuary data suggest that commoners could acquire significant wealth (Whalen 1988:300–301; Winter 1995). Most interments were associated with residences and consisted of simple graves, *fosa* (graves lined with stones or adobes), cists, adobe tombs, and stone masonry tombs. The most elaborate interments were those in stone masonry tombs, which were

likely interments of hereditary nobles such as Monte Albán Tomb 43 with 72 ceramic vessels and Tomb III with 51 vessels. There is considerable variability in offerings associated with other types of interments and even simple graves could include elaborate offerings such as Monte Albán Burial VI-12 with an offering of 29 vessels and onyx drill cores.

Another indicator of collective action and a corporate form of authority during the Late Formative involves resources mobilized by rulers to fund administrative institutions and to acquire wealth. The evidence suggests that the most important resource was probably labor provided by people from Monte Albán and nearby communities, which constituted a form of internal revenue consistent with collective action. The concentration of approximately three-quarters of the valley's population within 20 km of Monte Albán (Kowalewski et al. 1989) would have facilitated labor mobilization and tribute collection. The scale of monumental public buildings and spaces at Monte Albán during the early years of the site was considerable (Winter 2001). The initial version of the Main Plaza, dating to the late Middle Formative and Late Formative (500–100 BC), consisted of the plaza, along with the western row of buildings and much of the eastern half of the massive North Platform (figure 2.1). Early public buildings included Building L-sub along the southwestern end of the plaza and Building IV-sub on the northwestern end of the plaza; the walls of both buildings were constructed with huge monoliths.

Other sources of revenue could have involved the mobilization of agricultural production, tribute acquired through conquest, and the control of long-distance trade. Agricultural production available to the inhabitants of Monte Albán was probably insufficient to provision the city, necessitating the taxation of agricultural producers in communities outside the city, especially in newly settled piedmont areas (Kowalewski et al. 1989:123–126). The scale of resource mobilization to provision Monte Albán and the degree to which elites controlled and benefited from such transactions is unclear, however. Several researchers in Oaxaca have argued that the rulers of Monte Albán were also able to mobilize large armies for military conquest (Marcus and Flannery 1996; Redmond and Spencer 2006), although other archaeologists disagree and view conflict at this time as much smaller in scale (Joyce 2014; Zeitlin and Joyce 1999). Although some resources were probably acquired by Monte Albán through the establishment of tributary relationships, the evidence for tribute extraction is minimal (see Spencer 1982:246–250). Evidence also suggests that nobles had preferential access to prestige goods imported from outside the valley such as nonlocal pottery and ornaments of greenstone and shell (Winter 1984; Whalen 1988). The data do not suggest that rulers

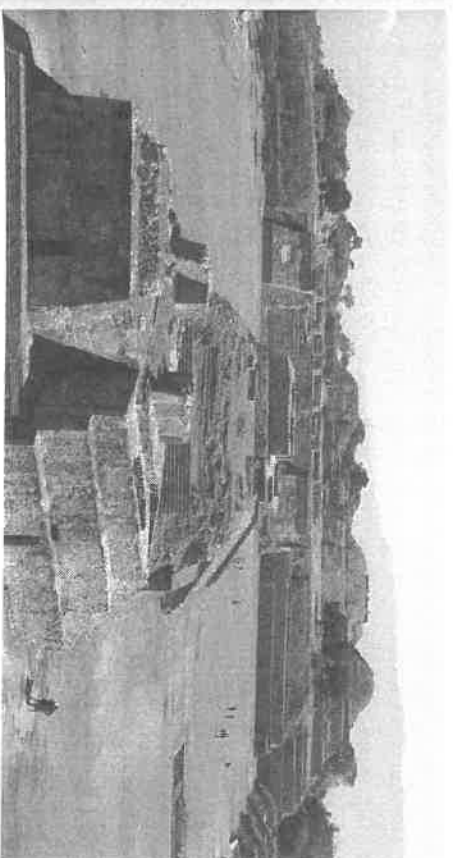


FIGURE 2.1. *View of the Main Plaza of Monte Albán. (Photograph by Sarah Barber.)*

directly controlled key utilitarian resources such as land or the production of pottery and stone tools (Fargher 2007; Parry 1987; Whalen 1988). Most of the resources on which the rulers of Monte Albán were dependent therefore represented internal sources of revenue, which would have given subjects greater power in negotiating more favorable relations vis-à-vis public goods and services (Blanton and Fargher 2008).

Since sources of revenue were largely internal, following Blanton and Fargher (2008) we would expect to see evidence of public goods provided by rulers in return. Although some exotic, nonlocal goods like ornamental shell and greenstone were available, the evidence suggests that public goods controlled by rulers of Monte Albán consisted largely of religious knowledge and authority. The first several centuries following the founding of Monte Albán were characterized by major innovations in religious belief and practice suggesting a connection with the dramatic political changes of the time (Blanton et al. 1999; Joyce 2000, 2010). Associations of elite residences and burials with religious symbols, spaces, and artifacts indicate that the nobility increasingly came to control ritual knowledge and authority, although high-ranking commoners may have also achieved positions of political and religious authority (Joyce 2010:143; Urcid 2011). Religious objects associated with elaborate tombs and burials included effigy vessels and urns, sometimes depicting the Zapotec rain deity Cocijo, and a variety of zoomorphic vessels usually representing animals associated with water, including ducks, conch shells, frogs, and toads. Hieroglyphic inscriptions and iconography indicate that rulers performed acts

of human sacrifice and autosacrifice (Urcid 2011). Sacrificial practices, especially human sacrifice, were particularly significant in contracting the other-world, reenacting the cosmic creation, and renewing the world (Joyce 2000; Monaghan 2009).

An important and widely shared aspect of Mesoamerican worldview was the idea that the current world was the result of a sacred covenant between humans and the divine whereby people petitioned deities for agricultural fertility and prosperity in return for sacrificial offerings. Sacrifice was both religious and ideological. It contributed to the legitimization of political authority because nobles or priests trained in institutional contexts performed the most powerful sacrificial rituals and because noble blood was considered to be more potent in contracting divinities than that of commoners (Joyce 2000). At the time of the Spanish Conquest, common people provided resources like labor and agricultural surpluses to the nobility with the expectation that elites would reciprocate by staging powerful ceremonies through which deities and ancestors were contacted on everyone's behalf (Monaghan 2009). Thus, the economic and ritual obligations of the sacred covenant acted as a kind of social contract between elites, commoners, and the gods.

The archaeological evidence indicates that Monte Albán's Main Plaza was the political and ceremonial center for the polity (Joyce 2000, 2004; Marcus and Flannery 1996; Winter 2001). The scale, accessibility, artifacts, symbolism, and architectural arrangement of the Main Plaza indicate that it was constructed as a performance space where thousands of people participated in politico-religious ceremonies led by the elite, including human sacrifice, autosacrifice, ancestor veneration, and deity impersonation (Joyce 2010:131–155; Urcid 2011). The spatial arrangement of architecture and iconography suggest that the Main Plaza symbolized the Zapotec version of the cosmos where rituals could be performed that reenacted the cosmic creation (Joyce 2000, 2004).

Although the evidence indicates that the wealth and political power of the nobility increased considerably during the Middle to Late Formative and that elites gained greater control over religious knowledge and authority, there appear to have been limits on the power of Monte Albán's rulers that are consistent with more communal or collective forms of authority (Joyce 2004, 2010). We argue that public settings like the Main Plaza stressed the symbols of communal authority and an emerging corporate identity, while muting representations of the increasingly powerful rulers of the city. The accessibility of the Main Plaza would have allowed people to monitor the behavior of rulers during public ceremonies and the sacred covenant may have acted as a strong moral code; both are means through which Blanton and Fargher

(2008:203–206) argue that subjects are able to monitor and gain trust in the behavior of rulers and ruling institutions.

Although nobles lived near the ceremonial precinct and directed public rituals, until the Classic period (AD 200–800), the Main Plaza itself had few overt representations of local nobles and there were no high-status residences directly facing the plaza (Joyce 2004). Rulers were represented solely in the hieroglyphic inscriptions set in Building L-sub, which were probably understandable only to the literate nobility (Urcid 2011). The earliest known ruler's portrait, Monument J-41, probably dates to the end of the Late Formative. The size, accessibility, and symbolism of the Main Plaza suggests that during Monte Albán's first four centuries the plaza was a focus of public ceremonies participated in by people from multiple communities in the valley. The plaza emphasized public buildings, public spaces, and cosmic symbolism including images depicting sacrifice, warfare, ancestors, and the shared Zapotec view of the cosmos.

Collective action is evident in the nearly 400 carved orthostats originally set into the walls of Building L-sub (frequently referred to as *danzantes*). In a recent reanalysis of the monuments, Urcid (2011; Urcid and Joyce 2014) has raised the possibility that the late Middle Formative and Late Formative rulers of Monte Albán may have shared political authority with more communal institutions (see Joyce 2010:131–159). The stones that remain *in situ* consist of alternating rows of horizontal and vertical stones that differ somewhat in style. Using pan-Mesoamerican contextual comparisons he questions the longstanding view that the Building L-sub orthostats represent sacrificial victims (e.g., Coe 1962; Marcus 1992). Instead, Urcid argues that the figures carved on the vertical stones represent men in the act of bloodletting by perforating their penises, with genital scrolls interpreted as blood (figure 2.2). The only representations of human sacrifice in his view are four depictions of severed heads. He interprets the horizontal figures on Building L-sub as ancestors contacted through the act of autosacrifice. The people performing autosacrifice are interpreted as members of a warrior sodality including low-status members depicted on the lower sections of the program and high status elders and Rain Deity impersonators on higher levels. While we find Urcid's analysis to be compelling, the traditional conception of the stones as sacrificial victims would also demonstrate that early authority at Monte Albán was strongly collective. The Building L-sub imagery emphasizes the collectively beneficial outcome of political action, in this case human or autosacrifice, rather than glorifying the individuals performing those sacrifices.

Overall, the evidence from the Valley of Oaxaca indicates the emergence of more hierarchical and far-reaching forms of political authority by the

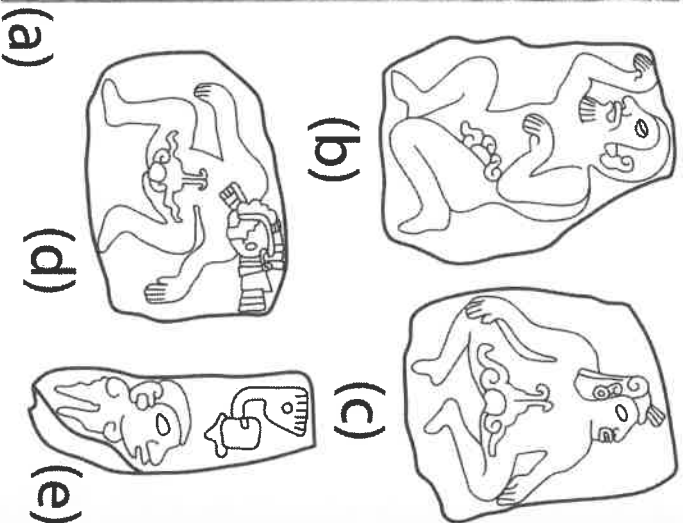


FIGURE 2.2. The carved-stone monuments from Building L-sub. (a) Photo of in situ horizontal and vertical monuments (photograph by Arthur Joyce); (b) elder from the upper section (redrawn with permission from Javier Urcid); (c) young adult from the lower row (redrawn with permission from Javier Urcid); (d) Rain God impersonator (redrawn with permission from Javier Urcid); (e) severed head (redrawn with permission from Javier Urcid).

Late Formative period. Yet the data also indicate that the Monte Albán polity exhibited many aspects of collective forms of political organization and economy. Commoners provided labor and perhaps agricultural surpluses and in return rulers sponsored important politico-religious ceremonies. Yet evidence suggests that the rituals carried out on Monte Albán's Main Plaza were cast as communal in emphasis and the authority of the nobility was muted in iconographic representations. If Urcid (2011) is correct in his reinterpretation of the Building L-sub orthostats, then communal forms of authority persisted alongside newer, more hierarchical ones.

Finally, although the evidence shows that the political, economic, and religious innovations of the first 400 years of Monte Albán drew thousands of people to the urban center, there are also indications that some people and

communities resisted incorporation into the polity. Redmond and Spencer (2006) argue that the political seat of the Tilcajete polity located 20 km southeast of Monte Albán successfully withstood attacks from Monte Albán for several hundred years.

Río Viejo

The Late Formative period in the lower Río Verde valley, like in the Valley of Oaxaca, was a time of population growth, increasing social inequality, the development of urbanism, and an increase in the construction of monumental buildings (Barber and Joyce 2007; Joyce 2006, 2010). In the lower Verde region, the development of urbanism lagged several centuries behind the Valley of Oaxaca. During the Late Formative, the two largest sites in the valley were Charco Redondo (70 ha) and San Francisco de Arriba (95 ha). Survey and excavations at both sites provide evidence for the construction of monumental public buildings (Butler 2011; Workinger 2002). Evidence from burials, domestic architecture, and the distribution of social valuables found at sites across the valley demonstrates the existence of modest hereditary social inequality (Joyce 1991, 2010; Joyce et al. 1998). Taking these data together, we hypothesize that both Charco Redondo and San Francisco de Arriba were seats of small-scale polities in the Late Formative.

Evidence suggests that the dominant locus of authority and identity during the Late Formative was communal, rather than hierarchical and exclusionary (Barber and Joyce 2007; Joyce 2010). At both large and small sites people were creating socially meaningful places through the construction and use of shared public spaces and monumental facilities that embedded collective actions and histories in specific locations on the landscape. For example, at the 1.5-ha site of Cerro de la Cruz excavations revealed a communal cemetery beneath the floors and alongside the walls of a public building used by multiple domestic groups (Joyce 1991). Adjacent to the building was a flagstone patio that included two hearths that far exceeded the size of typical domestic ones, suggesting their use in ritual feasts. In the presence of the dead, the living defined, maintained, and recreated a social group tied to the specific histories and spaces of Cerro de la Cruz. Similarly, the monumental public facilities of Charco Redondo and San Francisco de Arriba provided a locus at which supradomestic and probably multicomunity social ties were generated through collective actions ranging from labor to ritual.

The first urban center in the region emerged at Río Viejo, which grew to 225 ha during the Terminal Formative period (100 BC–AD 250; Joyce 2010).

Like in the Valley of Oaxaca, archaeological evidence suggests that the rulers of Río Viejo depended largely on internal revenue in the form of labor and in return provided political and religious services to the populace as a form of public good (Barber and Joyce 2007; Joyce 2006, 2010; Joyce and Barber 2011; Joyce et al. 2013). Monumental public buildings at Río Viejo provide the strongest evidence for labor as a source of internal revenue. The ceremonial core of the site consisted of two monumental earthen structures. The earlier was Mound 9-Structure 4, a large rectangular platform raised over the site's Late Formative residential areas (Joyce et al. 1998). In the first century AD, the ceremonial center was shifted approximately 500 m to the west of Mound 9-Structure 4. The new ceremonial center was located on the site's massive acropolis (Mound 1; figure 2.3). The acropolis was begun prior to AD 100, but a major occupation is not evident until the following century. At this time, the acropolis consisted of a platform rising at least 6 m above the floodplain, supporting two large substructures on its northwest and eastern sides (Structures 1 and 2, respectively) both of which stood at least 16 m high (Joyce and Barber 2011; Joyce et al. 2013). To the south, a 5- to 7-m-tall set of mounds surrounded an open plaza, the use of which cannot be determined because Formative-period occupational surfaces are now below groundwater. Our conservative estimate of the volume of the Terminal Formative acropolis is 455,000 m³.

The acropolis was an enormous building project that almost certainly would have required labor from beyond Río Viejo itself because large segments of the structure were built all at once rather than via accretion (Joyce et al. 2013). A large and well-organized labor pool is further evidenced by the labor-intensive construction techniques used to build significant segments of the acropolis. Much of the construction fill consists of a variety of earthen building techniques, including puddled adobe, adobe block, and rammed-earth (figure 2.4). The variability in earthen and masonry construction techniques indicates that the acropolis was built by multiple work groups drawn from different communities with divergent building traditions. Energetics analysis suggests that the acropolis required a minimum of 2.1 million person-days to build, a number too large to have been provided by the inhabitants of Río Viejo alone, given that the acropolis was likely built over a relatively brief period of time (Joyce et al. 2013; table 5.2).

Other forms of internal revenue, such as taxation on market transactions or agricultural goods, are less evident. For instance, the location of Río Viejo in the river's fertile floodplain makes it unlikely that the site needed to be provisioned with agricultural surpluses as was necessitated by Monte Albán's

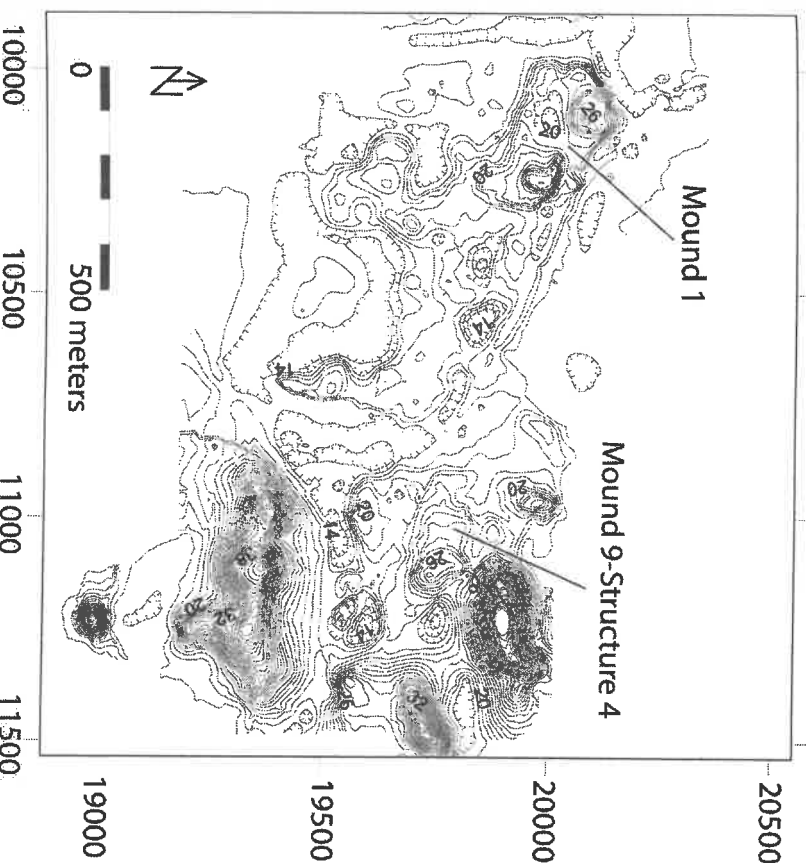


FIGURE 2.3. Plan of the eastern half of Río Viejo showing Mound 1 and Mound 9-Structure 4.

mountaintop location. Potentials sources of external revenue are similarly scarce. There is little evidence from the Formative period for craft specialization or the conquest of other regions that might have provided elites with external revenue. Although there is evidence that elites within the region exercised a degree of control over the importation of exotic, nonlocal goods such as greenstone, iron ore, and pottery, there are as yet no indications that these items were a major source of revenue exclusive to the rulers of Río Viejo (Barber 2013; Joyce et al. 1998; Levine 2002).

Construction and use of the Río Viejo acropolis indicate that Terminal Formative regional political authority was an outgrowth of preexisting notions of how social collectivities were defined and maintained. Both collective and



FIGURE 2.4. Retaining wall of an adobe platform on the acropolis at Río Viejo.
(Photograph by Sarah Barber.)

exclusive activities occurred on the acropolis. Recent excavations demonstrate that large-scale food preparation and consumption took place in the Terminal Formative, most likely associated with large-scale ritual feasting. A series of large middens were deposited in deep pits dug into the fill in the southeastern and southwestern corners of the acropolis. Materials included comals and other food-preparation vessels, dense lenses of estuarine mussel and other faunal remains, as well as elaborate serving vessels, imported serving vessels, and figurines. At the base of Structure 2, we recovered the remains of a large earth oven and oven refuse, presumably resulting from food preparation associated with feasts. The oven refuse consisted of burned rock and sherds used to retain heat and measured at least 10 m in diameter. More exclusive and elaborate ritual spaces were located on top of Structure 2, a large stepped platform, which supported an adobe superstructure with remnants of the only architectural stucco ever found in the valley (Joyce 2006).

Although settlement patterns and monumental architecture strongly indicate that a ruling elite oversaw a regional-scale polity with its political seat at Río Viejo, evidence of rulers has proved remarkably difficult to find (Joyce 2010). There are no known rulers' portraits or tombs in the region that date to the Terminal Formative. Instead, we see evidence for political authority in the distribution of the population, in the coordination required to underwrite monument construction, and in the sponsorship of feasting and other rituals. It is clear that inequality was well established regionally by this time; excavations at other sites have recovered elite residences and burials with elaborate grave goods (Barber 2013). An elite residence was uncovered near the ceremonial center of the secondary site of Cerro de la Virgen. The residence covered an area of 476 m² and included several rooms surrounding a patio measuring 13 × 13 m, making this residence far larger and more elaborate than typical residences in Oaxaca (e.g., Whalen 1988; Winter 1986). The house overlooked and was spatially associated with a monumental public plaza that included a ballcourt. Unlike Cerro de la Virgen, the Río Viejo acropolis, however, does not seem to have an elite residence adjacent to public spaces. The most elaborate Terminal Formative interment in the region comes from a public cemetery at the site of Yugué. This burial was a male interred wearing a plaster-backed iron-ore mirror and holding an intricately incised bone flute. The flute's incising depicts a skeletal male speaking or exhaling and likely indicates ritual responsibilities for the person with whom it was interred (Barber and Olvera Sánchez 2012).

Terminal Formative political relations in the lower Verde were dominated by collective action to an even greater extent than in the Oaxaca Valley. The evidence from Río Viejo's acropolis suggests a political strategy that was both enabled and constrained by historically embedded notions of corporate identity and practice. The tradition of geographically focused collective action in the region provided a framework through which Río Viejo's rulers were able to legitimize their authority at a regional scale. The relocation of the site center from Mound 9 to the acropolis would have made the new ceremonial center distinct from Río Viejo's earlier, more local histories and social relations. By constructing and using a regionally significant place (Mound 1) that embodied the history of the many communities in the valley that provided labor for its construction, Río Viejo's rulers facilitated a process whereby the kinds of acts that had for generations defined local places and social groups came to define a polity (Barber and Joyce 2007). People from these communities subsequently participated in ceremonial practices on the acropolis that included ritual feasting and perhaps other ceremonies (Joyce et al. 2013).

Indeed, sponsorship of these ceremonies was one of the primary public goods that rulers provided to followers. At the same time, the high visibility of such actions would have provided a means by which subalterns could monitor rulers' compliance with collective principles. The lack of rulers' portraits and of a palace on the acropolis, for instance, may represent rulers' efforts to demonstrate such compliance. Nonetheless, acts on the acropolis would have reiterated relations of domination and subordination. Its architecture was far larger than anything else in the region, providing highly visible evidence of the superordinate position of the rulers who sponsored construction and ritual action there.

Evidence for other public goods remains circumstantial. There is no evidence during the Terminal Formative for warfare such as defensive walls or a shift to more easily defended locations in the piedmont (Joyce 2010). Current data are insufficient to clarify whether this lack of conflict was a result of rulers facilitating regional safety as a public good, an outgrowth of broader social conditions at the time, or a result of archaeological sampling. Evidence for economic public goods like facilitation of market exchange or redistribution is extremely limited, although more data are needed. There is evidence for increasing standardization in fineware pottery between the Late and Terminal Formative periods (Levine 2002:167), which may indicate specialized production and perhaps regional exchange mechanisms that could either be taxed or aided by rulers.

OUTCOME OF FORMATIVE-PERIOD COLLECTIVE POLITICS IN OAXACA

Although complex, regional politics built on collective action developed at the end of the Formative period in both the Valley of Oaxaca and the lower Verde, the archaeological evidence suggests that political relations were characterized by a degree of tension and conflict (Joyce 2010). By the beginning of the Classic period (AD 250–800), both regions experienced major changes in political authority.

At Monte Albán, the Main Plaza had been a symbol of collective identity and authority during the Late Formative, but by the Terminal Formative it was increasingly controlled by and restricted to the nobility (Joyce 2004:205–207). New constructions on the plaza effectively closed off and restricted access to the ceremonial precinct. Noble residences began to be built directly on the North Platform and on the Main Plaza itself (Winter 2001). Given their proximity to the plaza, these residences may have been more “public” and

their residents more closely involved in politico-religious administration. If the Main Plaza and its public buildings and spaces operated as public goods as suggested above, then by the Terminal Formative rulers were restricting access to these goods, suggesting a more exclusionary form of political authority.

There are also indications that political elites at Monte Albán may have become less dependent on followers as sources of internal revenue and instead found resources (external revenue) that they controlled directly and used to fund political administration. For example, excavations at Monte Albán have discovered 31 ovens used for pottery production, most of which were located in the elite residential area north of the Main Plaza (Markens and Martínez 2009). The ovens were used to make creamware and brownware ceramics, including creamware types C.11 and C.12. These creamwares were expensive to manufacture, often with postfire scratch incising and large hollow supports, and their distribution in the Valley of Oaxaca was markedly status linked (Elson and Sherman 2007; Kowalewski et al. 1989). Elson and Sherman (2007) argue that step-fret designs on creamware vessels symbolized Cocjio, the rain-lightening deity, and were part of a pan-Mesoamerican system of elite display (see also Kowalewski et al. 1989). These symbols may have been another indication of the increasing control of important religious symbols and ceremonies by powerful elites. Furthermore, excavations in a nonresidential architectural complex on the northwestern corner of the Main Plaza recovered evidence of the production of shell ornaments and prismatic obsidian blades (Markens and Martínez 2009). These data indicate that elites at Monte Albán were involved in the specialized production of social valuables, making nobles less dependent on revenue provided by subjects.

The evidence therefore suggests that during the Terminal Formative political authority was becoming less communal and more exclusionary. There are also indications that as the rulers of Monte Albán increasingly gained power by appropriating the Main Plaza and defeating their competitors in the Valley of Oaxaca, tensions between traditional communal leadership and the nobility intensified (Joyce 2010). Evidence from the end of the Terminal Formative suggests that these tensions may have erupted in a political upheaval at Monte Albán around AD 200. At this time the major iconographic programs of the Late Formative, including the Building L-sub monuments, were dismantled (Urcid 2011). Building L-sub was partially demolished and buried under Building L and a temple on the North Platform was burned. A defensive wall was built around parts of the site and evidence suggests that one access point onto the Main Plaza was monitored through military force (Joyce 2010:19). Regardless of how the Building L-sub orthostats are interpreted,

the dismantling of these monuments may directly reflect the suppression of communal forms of authority that had existed alongside the hierarchical rulers of the polity. Evidence for the increasing formalization of status distinctions by the Early Classic period (AD 250–500) suggests that the more institutionalized and hierarchical forms of authority gained prominence (see Fargher, chapter 15, this volume).

In the lower Verde the end of the Formative period saw even greater political upheaval than in the Oaxaca Valley. Efforts to create a regional polity defined in terms of local and more egalitarian social groups were successful for a century or two, during which time Río Viejo remained the largest site in the valley and the seat of regional political authority. By AD 250, however, Río Viejo's acropolis fell into disuse and the site was severely depopulated (Joyce 2006; Joyce and Barber 2011). Several other large Terminal Formative floodplain sites with mounded architecture declined significantly in size or were abandoned. By the Early Classic, the regional settlement hierarchy decreased from five to four levels and there were as many as eight first-order centers of roughly equivalent size, indicating a period of political fragmentation. The kind of large-scale corporate social organization that had enabled the construction of Formative-period monumental buildings disappeared, and monumental construction never again matched that of the Terminal Formative.

The causes of the political collapse are unclear, although we hypothesize that one factor was tension between traditional communal forms of authority that were more local and egalitarian and the more exclusionary, hierarchical, and regional forms of rulership that were emerging at the end of the Formative. There is evidence that parts of the acropolis were heavily burned by fire prior to its abandonment. Excavations in several areas of the acropolis have revealed burned floors and burned adobe wall foundations. The burning was likely the result of termination rituals, although we cannot discount the possibility that it involved warfare or was accidental. Even though the acropolis was an important political and religious building that had required considerable communal labor to construct, it was left to slowly disintegrate over the next 250 years.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we have argued that both the early Monte Albán and Río Viejo polities exemplified the kind of corporate organization and collective action relationships that has been a focus of Richard Blanton's theoretical work. Although both polities can be seen as examples of corporate political

organizations and collective action, they also exhibit considerable variability in how social complexity and political authority was expressed and negotiated. In the lower Verde regional political authority collapsed after a brief and tenuous florescence, while elites in the Valley of Oaxaca were successful in institutionalizing hierarchical authority that would persist for more than a millennium.

We see a number of points of divergence that may have had significant consequences in the history of these polities, especially as they relate to the ability of rulers to extend their authority across multiple communities throughout a broader region. In the Valley of Oaxaca, evidence suggests that the rulers of Monte Albán were initially successful in negotiating shared forms of political control with more traditional communal forms of leadership. Although we see political authority in the Late Formative Valley of Oaxaca as largely communal, Monte Albán's rulers were successful in linking their authority and identity to a series of innovations in politico-religious belief and practice that served to set themselves apart from common people and provide them with a public good desired by people in the valley. An important aspect of these politico-religious innovations was the Main Plaza of Monte Albán, which was a socially significant place marked by architecture and imagery that was clearly distinct from previous ceremonial precincts. Rulers at Monte Albán were also successful in establishing a variety of sources of revenue, which increasingly through the end of the Formative included external revenue independent from the labor of subjects. Finally, polity rulers had recourse to coercive force to bring communities in the valley into compliance. For example, although we question the degree to which areas outside the valley were conquered, there is good evidence that Tlilajete was eventually defeated and incorporated into the Monte Albán polity (Redmond and Spencer 2006).

Political authority in the lower Río Verde valley appears to have been both highly communal and less successful in creating a regional political identity and extending authority across the region. Despite the scale of monumental construction at Río Viejo, the regional polity seems to have been weakly integrated and tenuous. At present, the evidence suggests that regionwide collective relationships revolved around labor as revenue and the sponsoring of politico-religious ceremony as a public good. We suspect that rulers may have been limited in their ability to extend economic and political interactions outside of Río Viejo, discouraging the development of administrative institutions that might have tied together communities. There are few indications of innovations in religious and political practice that would have distinguished rulers from followers and created public goods not available at the local level. Instead, what seems to have been new in terms of political relationships was limited to

a scaling-up of traditional practices that had previously materialized notions of local community identity including monumental construction programs and ritual feasting. The active maintenance of strong community identities, coupled with the inability of rulers to distinguish themselves from local elites, establish public goods distinct from those that were locally available, establish sources of external revenue, or develop a significant coercive capacity may have doomed the Río Viejo polity to collapse.

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3

Built Space as Political Fields

Community versus Lineage Strategies in the Tequila Valleys

CHRISTOPHER S. BECKMAN

This chapter operationalizes the corporate and exclusionary strategies proposed by Blanton and his colleagues (1996) by associating them with four contemporaneous social institutions with manifestations in built space. I use iconographic data to support and refine interpretation of the archaeological evidence in a manner similar to Small's (2009) historical-archaeological analysis in Greece. Individually and relationally, these social institutions formed a field (Bourdieu 1990) in which different forms of capital both provided admission to and constituted the objectives of competition. Once archaeological correlates for the field of power have been proposed, I consider how we might reinterpret the existing settlement pattern data for the Tequila valleys of Jalisco in the Late Formative and Early Classic periods and their relationship to the Teuchitlán polity. This allows me to bridge the gap between Blanton's work on political strategies and his regional settlement pattern research, and simultaneously contribute to the growing interest in the spatial aspects of authority (A. T. Smith 2003).

Blanton's more recent research with Fargher reorients his prior work on corporate-exclusionary strategies toward a rational choice model of human decision-making and self-organizational models of institution building. I limit my use of the model here for several reasons. Their book on collective action theory and much subsequent work (Blanton and Fargher 2008:25–32; Fargher et al. 2010) required detailed historical data

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